$2.25 April 19, 1996

COMMONWEAL

LOVE
HAD A
COMPASS

The Poetry
and
Journals of
ROBERT LAX

James Uebbing

that all
indeed
was real

all had
history
and a
name
(as though
the moment
had been
rapt beyond
itself
and was eternal
while it
moved
in time)

I saw
each object
then in
its relation
(to a
timeless
being)

and my
heart
sang
(but kept
its deepest
peace)

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WILSON CAREY McWILLIAMS on Bob Dole

RICHARD ALLEVA Shakespeare goes to the movies

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To the Editors

Leon's corner

Couple of mild malapropisms in your editorial on Buchanan ("Bully in the Pulpit," March 8): "To say that Buchanan is a throwback is to belabor the obvious." To *belabor* is to beat up on. To *labor* in this context is to overwork. Then, in the next sentence, "hearkens back," as your unabridged may tell you, should be *harks* back. (As for why hearken is spelled with an extra "e" and hark is not, don't ask.)

Hey, but thanks for the lovely cover photo of Emma Thompson and your increasingly amusing cartoons—apart from your everworthy serious content.

LEON LUKASZEWSKI
Walnut Creek, Calif.

The answer, please

Philip Gleason's article "How Catholic Is the Declaration of Independence?" (March 8) never answers the title's question. It merely tells us the views of Catholic historians over two generations ago when Catholic patriotism was being attacked. In "the situation as it then existed," Gleason writes, "there was genuine merit" to the position that Scholastic political principles formed an important element in the intellectual background of American constitutional thought. But is that the verdict of competent historians today? Given the numerous revisions of historical judgments in the past seventy years, we need an up-to-date answer to this important question.

J. F. TREACY
Clarkston, Mich.

The author replies:

The title given by *Commonweal*'s editors to the extract from my book on the history of Catholic higher education has understandably misled reader Treacy. The article does not give an "up-to-date answer" to the question in the title because it was not written with that question in mind. Its purpose was to lay out the larger dimensions of the so-called "Bellarmine-Jefferson legend," to show that it was not so absurd as is usually assumed, and to explain its role in the thinking of American Catholics in the 1920s. I am not an expert on the history of political theory, and there has been much disagreement over the past twenty years or so about the sources of American republicanism. However, I believe there is still genuine merit to the claim that Catholic thinkers of the medieval and Counter-Reformation eras made significant contributions to the "higher law" background of American constitutional thought.

PHILIP GLEASON

What did Jesus say?

Robert L. Wilken's review of the Luke Timothy Johnson book *The Real Jesus* [March 8]—leaves me very unhappy. I have been teaching New Testament in a college seminary for over twenty-five years. Though I have the deepest respect for both Luke Johnson and Robert Wilken, and though I have not yet read Johnson's book, I still deplore the negative aspects of both the book and Wilken's approving review—and I have nothing but scorn for the *Commonweal* headline, "The Jesus Seminar gets an 'F.'"

The quest for the historical Jesus is a very important undertaking in contemporary New Testament scholarship. It should be a matter of pride for us that Catholic scholars are in the lead in this serious quest. That they should be opposed by Luke Johnson, the more conservative scholar, should not surprise us, but we should not be left with the erroneous judgment that Johnson is closer to normative Catholicism than they are.

According to Wilken, the real topic of Johnson's book is "the dire state of biblical scholarship within the academy, including seminaries and theological faculties." He adds that "[h]istorical criticism...seems more and more irrelevant to the church's life." That is far removed from the opinion of Pius XII, who gave his approval to historical criticism in *Divino afflante spiritu* (1943).

In the first volume of his monumental work *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, John Meier draws a careful distinction between the "real" Jesus and the "historical Jesus," and concludes that "the real Jesus is not available and never will be," for "the reasonably complete record of the 'real' Jesus is irrevocably lost for us today." In his subtitle, "The Misguided Search for the Historical Jesus," Johnson reveals his prejudice. What is misguided about it?

The book's main thrust is an attack on the Jesus Seminar, a group of forty New Testament scholars who meet semi-annually to discuss the authenticity of Jesus' words in the New Testament. Thirty years ago when a colleague, a Unitarian scholar at Saint Lawrence University, said that the only words of Jesus we could be sure were authentic were "Amen, amen," I felt a great shock. Now, having read carefully the statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the historical veracity of the Gospels (1964), I no longer expect the words of Jesus quoted in the Gospels to be necessarily authentic.

Johnson and Wilken attack the Jesus Seminar with emotionally charged accusations. According to Wilken the Seminar is "interested in publicity"; its "whole enterprise is designed for self-promotion." His assertion that "the scholarly claims of the Jesus Seminar are fraudulent" and his derisive reference to the Seminar's "hucksterism and religious prejudices" and its "arrogant dismissal of the Christian theological traditions" are unsubstantiated.

If I read this in the pages of *The Wanderer* I would not be surprised; to

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COMMONWEAL

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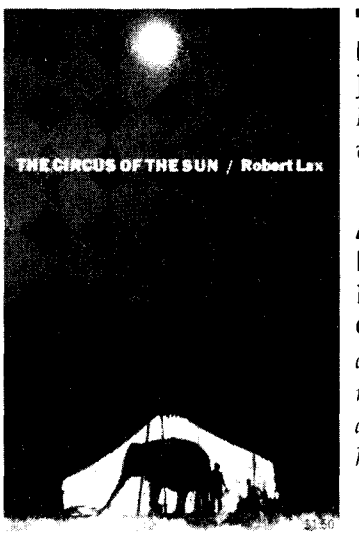

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see it in the pages of *Commonweal* was most distressing. Those involved in the Jesus Seminar are not self-promoting hucksters but serious scholars. I am often at odds with Dominic Crossan, for one example, especially when he attacks Raymond Brown, but I still respect his scholarship, as well as that of Robert Funk. In sum, this was a very unfortunate review and does no credit to *Commonweal*.

(MSGR.) JOSEPH G. BAILEY
Hammond, N.Y.

The reviewer replies:

Monsignor Bailey underestimates the changes that have taken place in biblical scholarship over the past several generations. A scholarly enterprise that was once closely linked to the church has gradually become divorced from Christian faith and life.

There is no question that historical scholarship on the Bible has taught us a great deal. As any perusal of current dictionaries of the Bible will show, we know far more about ancient culture, about biblical languages, about Jesus and his world than did previous generations. The question, however, is not whether we know more but how we are to understand and interpret what we know. Is the Bible to be viewed primarily as a collection of documents from the ancient world providing information on the beginnings of an interesting religious movement in Roman Palestine? Or is it also to be viewed as a book of the church? Does the tradition that was formed by the Scriptures, and by Jesus' death and Resurrection, have a role in helping us understand who he was?

The recent report of the Pontifical Biblical Commission recognized the value of the different methods now being used to interpret the Bible, but it also reminded scholars that the Bible is to be interpreted in light of the mystery of Christ revealed in the Scriptures. Johnson's book and my review are very much in the spirit of this report, and I am confident that when Monsignor Bailey reads the book he will see that Johnson is onto something important and timely.

ROBERT L. WILKEN

It's still the economy

Kudos to Ralph Filicchia ["A Buchananite Speaks," March 22] for his key insight, that "the absolute power of corporate America also corrupts absolutely." And kudos also to *Commonweal* for publishing a piece that provides some insight as to why a thoughtful blue-collar worker like Mr. Filicchia would vote Republican.

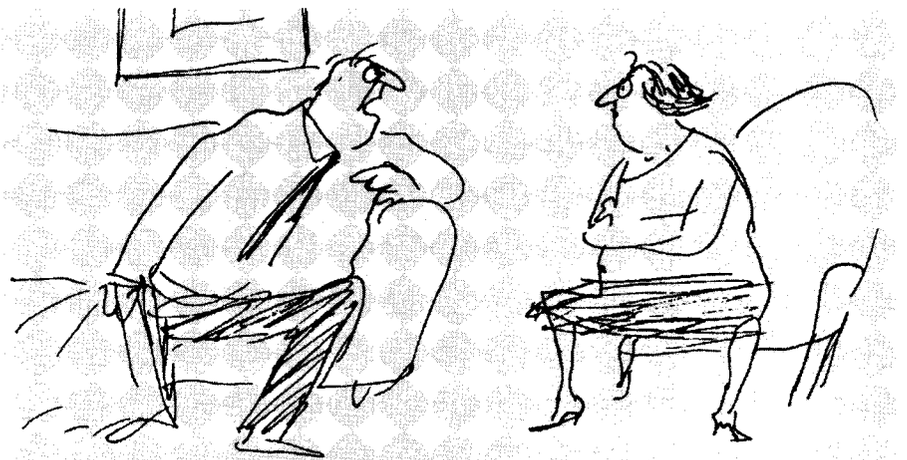
Unfortunately, I have encountered him (in your pages) as he is turning to a third party, so I have to bring him home in two steps.

I hope I can persuade him, first, that voting for a third party in a presidential election in 1990s America is just a symbolic protest that will have no more than ephemeral influence on the course of events, and, second, that his only hope of staying even economically (not to speak of advancing) is to vote for the Democrats.

If he can't bring himself to vote for Bill Clinton, so be it, but what about his local, state, and congressional races? That's where key decisions are made about allocation of resources.

Politics and government are about enlightened self-interest, the banding together of people with common goals to get part of what they want in give-and-take with people who want something else. It is my view that many like Mr. Filicchia have abandoned their economic self-interest by voting for Republicans because they think their self-interest in a morally clean America or in anti-communism is more important. On this issue, I am prochoice, but I do think working-class people who vote Republican have abandoned their own economic self-interest, and that of their parents and children. I myself can't do that. And, I cheerfully confess, one reason I can't is that the Republicans laugh at and about anyone who abandons his or her economic self-interest.

CHRISTOPHER A. CONROY



"This is just between you and me, Wilma. Let's leave the fact that I'm a political maverick out of it!"

Values are teachable

David R. Carlin, Jr.'s opinion [February 9] on the teaching of values in public schools lacks real-life insight. I presume Mr. Carlin does not teach in a public school, or else he would know that just as prayer and tests never left the public schools, neither did the teaching of values. Cheating is not valued in testing but honesty is; bullying is not valued

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Clinton's choice

President Bill Clinton had a chance to practice what he preaches on abortion but is passing it up. Early in his term, Clinton said that he thought abortions should be safe, legal, and rare. Now he has promised to veto "The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban," which would have made at least one form of abortion rarer—it could be used only to save the life of the mother. The law, banning what its supporters call "partial-birth abortion" and what the law's opponents call "intact dilation and extraction," would have prohibited a procedure used in late second- and third-trimester abortions, that is, after twenty weeks gestation.

According to testimony given in graphic detail about the procedure before a House committee last year: after dilating the cervix, the physician draws down the body of the fetus into the birth canal exposing everything but the head; the cranium is then punctured and the content of the brain cavity is suctioned out, thus killing the fetus. The head is crushed and the remainder of the fetus is "delivered."

By twenty weeks, a fetus, though still very small, looks remarkably like a baby. That is one reason why John Leo, writing in *U.S. News and World Report*, concluded that the procedure "looks like infanticide" (November 20, 1995). But for the agnosticism of *Roe* v. *Wade* about when and how fetal life is to be protected, it *would* be infanticide. Another inch or two, another minute, and a baby, premature to be sure but a baby nonetheless, would have been born. At that point, the law requires doctor and nurses to swing into action to try to save its life.

Accurate information on the procedure is hard to come by. Few doctors perform the procedure—or, at least, few admit to it. Congressional hearings identified two. Proponents of the procedure say that it is required in cases where the mother's health and future fertility is in jeopardy, but at least one physician has said he uses the procedure for elective abortions. Nor is it clear how many such abortions take place each year. Of the 13,000 annual late-term abortions, it is estimated that 450 to 2,000 use this method.

Abortion-rights proponents argue that the ban on partial-birth abortions is an unwarranted legislative intrusion into medical practice and a wedge meant to curtail late-term abortions. It is true that all late-term abortions are grisly; most end in delivering what, after all, looks like a baby. Why single out the partial-birth abortion procedure for legislative action? Perhaps, because more than other procedures it highlights the legal anomaly—the fine line between life and death, between killing a fetus and caring for a premature infant. Perhaps, because it shows that what *Roe* v. *Wade* did allow—restrictions on abortion after viability—has never been honored in law or medical practice. Perhaps, because those opposed to abortion have so few avenues for bringing to the attention of the media or of lawmakers the reality of abortion: It involves the taking of an infant life; in this case, demonstrably so.

In the national debate, abortion opponents are commonly portrayed as the heavies, rigid in their thinking and uncaring in their attitudes. In this instance, they raised a legal and moral issue which deserved serious consideration. Congress

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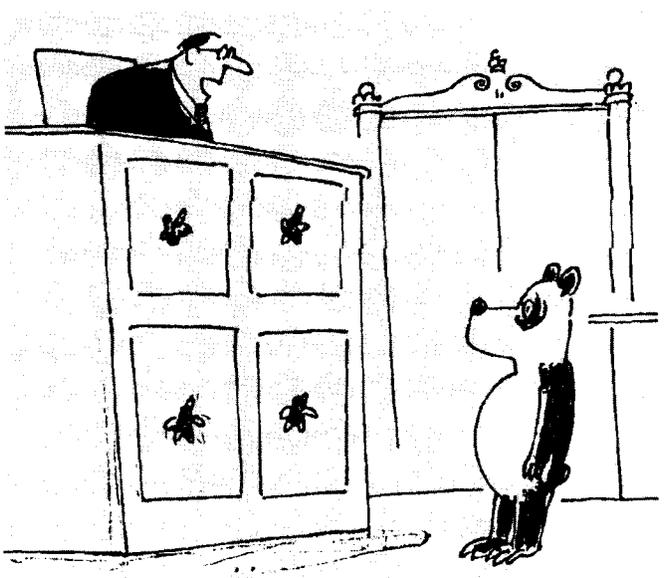
paid attention (yes, a very conservative Republican Congress, but the bill passed with many Democratic votes). Still, abortion supporters adamantly refused to deal with the facts of the matter, instead finding in the hearings, the pictures, the descriptions, and the vote a direct attack on what they love to call a fundamental constitutional right. Kate Michelman of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARRAL), said the House vote in favor of the ban, "is the most devastating and appalling attack on a woman's freedom to choose in the history of the House" (*New York Times*, November 4, 1995).

Here is the real quandary: Why does a procedure that can reasonably be called infanticide get so much support from prochoice forces and from Bill Clinton?

Last year, the *New Yorker* (Jane Mayer, December 4, 1995) and the *New Republic* (Naomi Wolfe, October 16, 1995) opened their pages to examinations of the moral issues involved in abortion. Wolfe wrote that she wants abortion supporters to admit "that the death of a fetus is a real death; that there are degrees of culpability, judgment, and responsibility in the decision to abort a pregnancy." Mayer allowed that "intact dilation and extraction, which can be used as late as the twenty-fourth week, can be portrayed—and not altogether implausibly—as bordering on infanticide." She, too, thought that prochoice advocates, "by refusing to entertain the idea that some abortions under some circumstances might in fact be wrong, are preventing themselves from arguing convincingly for those that are right." Yet in the end, neither writer could find in her moral queries and concerns any reason to conclude that this particular procedure or any abortion procedure was morally or legally beyond the pale.

In the final analysis, these writers exude a moral earnestness about abortion that is not matched by any substantive moral or political action. President Clinton is guilty of the same grave failing.



"You are accused of pandering."

ET CETERA

TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER ■ Recent news from the Midwest led us to check our list of subscribers to see how many of them live in the diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska, whose Ordinary recently told members of Call to Action (along with other groups) that they should resign from it or face excommunication (*see*, James A. Coriden, below). Call to Action favors women's ordination and urges that priestly celibacy should be optional. Shocking as it may seem, we suspect that there are *Commonweal* readers in the Lincoln area who share these views. Our quick survey made clear that there are DOZENS of possible suspects. It occurred to us that their identities would be of interest to the local chancery office—and that one way of searching them out would be to buy our list. But not to worry, Lincolnites. If we get a bid, we'll give each of you a chance to top it.

OBSERVATION

EVEN IN LINCOLN, DOUBTFUL LAWS DON'T APPLY ■ On March 19, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Nebraska, issued a law proclaiming that all Catholics in his diocese who belong to any one of a dozen organizations were by that very fact under interdict, and that any who persisted in such membership were by that very fact excommunicated (the *Southern Nebraska Register*, March 22, 1996).

The groups named included two that are prochoice on abortion, two that cling to the Tridentine church, five affiliates of Freemasonry (including the notorious Rainbow Girls!), the Hemlock Society, and the real targets: Call to Action and its new Nebraska affiliate. Membership in any of these, said the bishop, "is always perilous to the Catholic faith."

All by itself, that is startling news. It is even more so to those of us who knew Fabian Bruskewitz as a student in Rome: an alert, confident, cheery young man, always genial and good-humored. It's occurred to me to hope that the first April issue of the *Register*, not yet delivered at this writing, will be headlined "April Fool!" But that's even more unlikely than the edict itself.

Cardinal John Krol, who died on March 3, may already be turning over in his grave. Though usually described as a conservative during his tenure as archbishop of Philadelphia, Krol was a distinguished canonist with a clear understanding of the limits of law. When the Code of Canon Law was being revised after the Second Vatican Council, Krol, who was not afflicted with timidity, strongly recommended that all *latae sententiae* penalties (that is, those to be applied "automatically") should be eliminated. He recognized that such penalties are not only useless, but pastorally harmful.

Krol's recommendation was not entirely accepted, but the "sanctions" section of the new Code was greatly modified in the direction he suggested. The number of such penalties was drastically reduced, and great cautions were introduced about imposing them. Only a few "automatic" penalties were

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retained, in order to punish, for example, one who profanes the Most Holy Eucharist (canon 1367) or one who physically attacks a bishop (c. 1370.2).

Bishops are "not to threaten automatic penalties unless perhaps against certain particularly malicious offenses" and they are "not to establish censures, especially excommunication, except with the greatest moderation and only for more serious offenses" (c. 1318). Furthermore, bishops are to see to it that such penalties are uniform in their region of the country (c. 1316). One of the principles adopted by the 1967 Synod of Bishops to guide the revision of the Code stated that automatic penalties are to be reduced to a few and "inflicted only for the most serious offenses."

It's hard to know at this distance whether any Catholics of the Lincoln diocese—including those who belong to one or more of the organizations listed—have been frightened by their bishop's proclamation. In fact there is no reason for fear; none of them will fall under its threatened automatic interdicts or excommunications. That should be clear from what has already been said, but there's more.

First of all, no one is subject to such penal sanctions unless his or her action is fully and gravely imputable by reason of malice or culpability (cc. 1321, 1324.1.10). The rule of thumb is: a level of deliberation and malice sufficient to commit a mortal sin.

Second, anyone unaware of violating such a law is not subject to its penalty (c. 1323.2). Anyone aware of the law, but unaware that there was a penalty attached to it, is exempt from punishment (c. 1324.9).

Finally, a law so contrary to the spirit and letter of Canon Law, so sweepingly broad and aimless, so unsupported by evidence of necessity, so intemperate and harsh, and so contemptuous of the precious value of ecclesial communion, is invalid on its face, or at best a doubtful law. Doubtful laws do not oblige (c. 14). They are worse than no law at all, because of the confusion they engender.

Not to worry, southern Nebraskans, the threat is idle.

JAMES A. CORIDEN

James A. Coriden is professor of church law at Washington Theological Union.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

WHY CLINTON WILL LOSE

(Unless he's very lucky)

In the world of political journalism, one of the strangest items of conventional wisdom floating around for the past few months is that President Bill Clinton is likely to be re-elected in November, 1996. I don't say he will definitely not be re-elected; politics, after all, is a very uncertain business. But I say he's the underdog; if he wins, it will be a great upset. I'm also saying that his underdog status should be perfectly obvious to anyone who looks beyond the latest opinion polls.

Consider a few long-term trends.

Since 1968 the United States has had seven presidential elections, and the Democrats have won only two. Further, both wins were due to exceptional circumstances: in 1976 Jimmy Carter won when the nation punished the Republicans for the Watergate scandal; in 1992 Bill Clinton won with only 43 percent of the vote.

In other words, the Democrats long ago ceased being what might be called the "normal" majority party in presidential elections, a position they held from 1932 through 1964. By 1972 (the year of Richard Nixon's landslide win over George McGovern) things had shifted and the Republicans had come to be the normal majority.

Despite this, the Democrats remained the majority party in Congress (except for the GOP control of the Senate in the early 1980s), thereby creating an illusion of robust health. Much of their congressional power, however, depended on retaining traditionally Democratic Southern seats. But that situation was bound to end sooner or later, as white voters in the South relentlessly abandoned their old Democratic loyalties. The end finally arrived in 1994, when Republicans, for the first time ever, captured a majority of House seats in the old Confederate states.

There is no demographic mystery as to why the Democrats have grown less and the Republicans greater. In the days of Franklin Roosevelt the two taken-for-granted mainstays of the party were European Catholics and white Southerners. But white Southerners are gone now, having disappeared for a number of reasons: race, moral concerns, upward mobility. Non-Hispanic Catholics, who began their exit from the party later than the Southerners, are less completely gone; but they have largely disappeared, and trend lines indicate they are likely to continue disappearing. In the Catholic exodus, unlike the Southern, race was not a factor; this is why the Southern defection came earlier. But the other two issues—moral concerns and upward mobility—have been the same for both groups.

Over time the Democrats have attempted to replace disappearing Catholics and Southerners with other groups: blacks, Hispanics, feminists, gays. But the number of replacements is smaller than the number of defections.

Worse still, the new recruits have the effect of accelerating defections. For instance, as the Democratic party in many parts of the South becomes black-dominated, whites, even those with little or no racial bias, come to feel it is no longer their party. Just as almost all whites (even liberals) are reluctant to live in a black neighborhood or join a black so-

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cial club, so they are reluctant to belong to a black political party. Or take California: if you're not black or Hispanic or a feminist or a gay or an ideological liberal, you increasingly feel like a duck out of water if you remain a Democrat.

In their heyday labor unions were a powerful force helping the Democrats. But that heyday is gone. Unions once represented better than 40 percent of the private-sector workforce; they now represent about 11 percent. Labor compensated for this loss by organizing public-sector workers; but once again, defections are more numerous than replacements. In 1960 nearly one-third of all workers, public and private combined, belonged to unions; today the number is less than one in six. Besides, union leadership, though it can deliver money to Democrats, is no longer effective at delivering the votes of its members.

Given these long-term trends, how can a reasonable political analyst think that a Democratic candidate for president, whether Bill Clinton or anybody else, can be anything other than an underdog? But the media look at polls, not history. Like a recovering alcoholic, they live one day at a time. During late 1995 and early 1996 Clinton did well in the polls—better, for instance, than Bob Dole. Ergo, Clinton is likely to be reelected.

This kind of thinking is a sign not just of historical ignorance but of an inability to read opinion polls. "If the presidential election were held today, how would you vote?" asks the typical pollster. They might as well ask, "If you were the president of France, what would you do about Corsican terrorists?" But I am not the president of France, and if I were, there is a good chance my Corsican policy would be different from the casual answer I would give to the pollster over the phone. Likewise the presidential election is not being held today; and if it were, the typical voter would be much more focused, and his or her response might well be different from the one casually given to the pollster.

In other words, polls taken months before election day are meaningful only for highly committed voters who are, let's say, 95-percent certain how they'll vote. Early polls are nearly meaningless when it comes to voters with a lower degree of certainty, since most of these people don't have anything that can, strictly speaking, be called an opinion; just as I don't have an opinion on Corsican terrorists, even though I can answer the question asked by the "opinion" pollster. In such cases we have leanings, feelings, inclinations, fancies, hunches, impressions, etc., but not opinions.

Clinton needs a lucky break to win: for instance, a terrible ideological rupture within the GOP, or a significant third-party candidate who will draw votes from the Republicans, or a major scandal connected with Bob Dole's vice-presidential nominee. He may get his lucky break; anything can happen in politics. But until then he's a clear underdog in the 1996 race. □

Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr.

ARE ALL 'RATS' EQUAL?

The Supreme Court looks at VMI

In 1954 the Supreme Court did the nation a great favor when, in *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, it repudiated racial apartheid, American-style. And Congress moved the ball a lot further when it prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, sex, and religion in the most important statute of this century, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But that doesn't mean that all forms of discrimination are equally abhorrent. For example, single-sex schools like Wellesley or Saint Mary's College are expressly protected under Title IX of the 1972 federal statute that otherwise prohibits sex discrimination in federally funded educational programs. That suggests that governmental classifications based on gender are not quite the same as those based on race. But may state or federal funds be used to support military institutions that exclude women? Would separate facilities for men and women who want training that would enable them to serve in the military necessarily violate the equal protection clause? In other words, do we need to be discriminating about discrimination?

These questions are squarely presented in a case on the Supreme Court's docket this term involving a challenge by the federal government to the males-only admissions policy of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI). The lower courts found that this policy was unconstitutional and ordered the State of Virginia to correct this violation of women's rights by setting up a comparable program for women known as the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership (VWIL). The federal government has pulled out all the stops in its briefs, arguing not only that VWIL is itself unconstitutional because it is a separate facility available only to women, but also that "all classifications that deny opportunities to individuals based on their gender should be subjected to strict judicial scrutiny."

"Strict scrutiny" is a legal buzzword for invalidating a governmental classification with a discriminatory effect. For several decades the Court has said that racial classifications must be reviewed under this standard, and has—with the sole exception of some affirmative-action cases—nearly always found racial classifications to be constitutionally impermissible. The whole point of *Brown* was to reject the idea that "separate but equal" schools were really providing equal educational opportunity when children were segregated along racial lines. But in 1973 only four justices thought that the "strict scrutiny" standard should be extended to classifications based on gender, and none of those justices now sits on the Court.

It is unlikely that a majority of the Court will now adopt this standard in the VMI case. First, the government only raised this claim in the Supreme Court, and the Court could

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reject the claim as not properly preserved by the government in this record. Second, the federal government could prevail in the VMI case by proving that Virginia's maintenance of separate facilities for military training of men and women does not "serve important governmental objectives," to quote the standard that currently governs sex discrimination cases. But even if five justices agree with this view of the present case, they may still hesitate to change the standard for future cases.

It is by no means a foregone conclusion that the only constitutional remedy in the VMI case is to require that institution to open its doors to women. Some might think of a kinder and gentler female military as a multiple oxymoron, but one might also wonder whether the only path to equal dignity for women is one that puts women into the VMI's notoriously abusive "rat line." The federal government's brief describes this strict seven-month regimen as one in which first-year cadets, or "rats," are "treated miserably," like "the lowest animal on earth." The brief suggests that this "strict system of punishments and rewards" creates a "sense of accomplishment and bonding" between the "rats" and their "fellow sufferers and tormentors." Maybe so, but other educators might strive to achieve a sense of accomplishment and bonding without a rat line. I don't know what the federal government was trying to prove when it acknowledged in its brief that the "principal object" of the VMI environment is "to induce stress" in "stark and unattractive rooms, with poor ventilation, unappealing furniture, windowed doors with no locks and no window coverings." But I cannot see much harm in allowing the VWIL to try to train women for military leadership in a different environment and with a different educational purpose in mind.

Virginia has argued that its objectives in operating a separate facility for women at the VWIL are not based on archaic stereotypes about the role of women in the military or in society. The state maintains that the VWIL offers educational benefits to women that are comparable to those provided to men at the VMI and that any differences between the VMI and the VWIL are pedagogically justified. And it insists that, in the formation of its educational policy, it may take into account real differences between the sexes, with at least as much freedom as that enjoyed by single-sex academies under Title IX.

The VMI case is a close one. The Court could rely heavily on a 1982 decision that rejected a state-operated nursing college available only to women. Or the Court could rely instead on a 1975 case in which it granted women longer tenure than men before mandatory discharge because the Navy had not given women an equal opportunity to have seagoing experience. No matter which way the Court rules in the case, it will offer all of us another opportunity to reflect about the ways in which we value women in our society and to reflect as candidly about the ways in which we have placed them, to quote former Justice William Brennan, "not on a pedestal but in a cage" by denying them adequate opportunities to be their fullest and truest selves. And the VMI case gives us a chance to rethink the equation of equality with sameness, and to acknowledge that real differences between the sexes can be accommodated and even celebrated without abandoning our commitment to equality. □

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Seamus O'Shean

MAJOR BLUNDER

Votes & violence in Ireland

The Provisional Irish Republican Army ended its cease-fire on February 9 by setting off a bomb at London's Canary Wharf that killed two people and injured dozens. A week later a twenty-one-year-old immigrant from County Wexford, blew himself up along with the bus he was riding on. The bombings were atrocious and counterproductive.

The precipitating excuse was British Prime Minister John Major's call at the end of January for elections in Northern Ireland before all-party negotiation could begin. Although these negotiations are deemed the essential goal in the January 22 Mitchell report (from the international body chaired by former U. S. Senator George Mitchell), Major seized upon the brief mention of elections (fifty-sixth out of sixty-two proposals) to push his current position that elections must precede talks. In response, John Hume (deeply committed to nonviolent and constitutional democratic methods) of Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labor Party expressed enormous frustration at the new roadblock Major had introduced into the peace process. He accused Major of sacrificing the chance for peace by catering to Ulster Unionists on the election issue, in order to preserve his own leadership.

Major's demand was seen by Hume and others as an attempt to establish another precondition to all-party peace talks, violating the spirit of the negotiated understandings in the lead-up to the cease-fire. Unfortunately the reaction of the Provisional Irish Republican Army arose from that same sense of frustration and betrayal. Now it has cost lives in London.

Americans, generally supportive of democratic electoral processes, might ask why the suggestion of elections was *not* welcomed by Irish democratic politicians, such as Hume and the coalition government in Dublin.

Their great suspicion of the British proposal is based on current practice and the memory of past electoral practices in Northern Ireland. The traditional Nationalist position is that the last valid election was held in 1918 when voters from the entire island made up the electorate. A *Dail* was elected with a majority (1.2 out of 1.5 million) favoring some form

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of independence from Britain. But after the 1921 treaty, Northern Ireland was "gerrymandered" into existence by the British, dividing it from the "South."

Because at the time, a vote in the nine counties of Ulster might not have insured a Unionist majority committed to remaining in the "United Kingdom," three counties–Donegal, Monaghan, and Cavan—were left outside the border and thus eliminated from the vote for both the Northern Ireland (Stormont) and British (Westminster) Parliament. In fact, insofar as possible, lines were drawn to ensure a Unionist (or at least Protestant) majority in each of the remaining counties and in each local governing body. The City of Derry (Londonderry) Council is the most frequently cited example, having twice as many Unionist as Nationalist councillors, despite a Nationalist (or Catholic) majority overall.

This gerrymandered system lasted well into the 1970s and is still practiced, though with more subtlety. Until 1969, when universal suffrage was introduced in Northern Ireland, the vote was limited to landowners and rate [tax] payers. Thus the Unionists, with approximately two-thirds of the eligible voters, regularly returned ten of the twelve members to Westminster.

This may look like a history too ancient to be relevant, but consider what has happened in the last twenty-five years. Elections of various sorts have been held since the beginning of the troubles in the late '60s. In 1973 proportional representation was tried at the district-council level with a "single transferrable vote" (STV) system. (Voters number the candidates by preference, and as a candidate is either elected or eliminated in each successive count, the voter's second choice receives the transferred vote, and so on down the ballot.) Hopes were high for a Northern Ireland Assembly to be elected by proportional representation, and, in fact, there was a record voter turnout. But the Assembly was sabotaged by the Unionists themselves. Many did not keep election pledges to support the results, making the Assembly and then the associated executive body unworkable. In the spring of 1974 Loyalist paramilitaries brought down the executive and the entire elective conciliatory process by enforcing a general strike cutting off all utilities and services. British security forces did not intervene. At the same time, Loyalist car bombs in Dublin and Monaghan Town in the Republic killed thirty-three and injured well over a hundred.

In 1982 a Westminster proposal for a Northern Ireland Assembly, to which some administrative function for the province would devolve, was rejected by Unionists. However, when the plan passed the House of Commons and elections were to be held, the local Unionist party machines decided to participate and moved into high gear. It was also the first time *Sinn Fein* took part in elections.

By this time, the Unionists had mastered the STV system of proportional representation. Hard-line Unionists (the UUP, or Ulster Unionist Party; and the DUP, or Democratic Unionist Party) took forty-seven of the seventy-eight seats (60 percent) despite having just about 52 percent of the first-preference votes. A moderate unionist party, the Alliance, with fewer first-preference votes, achieved twice as many seats as *Sinn Fein*. Both Gerry Adams and Martin McGuiness were elected with three others of their party but did not take their seats in protest. This Assembly suffered on for four years with boycotts by various groupings of parties. In June of 1986 it was dissolved and Ian Paisley was evicted along with twenty-one remaining die-hards from the chambers by the Royal Ulster Constabulary police. James Molyneaux, then leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, said that the experience "had made the achievement of any sort of democracy in Northern Ireland virtually impossible." The May 1993 Northern Ireland District Council elections, despite attempted redistricting and the addition of sixteen more council seats than in 1989, managed, as *Fortnight* magazine commented, "to enhance republican defiance and loyalist paranoia *at the same time*."

These events are in the minds of the Irish people and of political representatives now struggling for a way toward peace. When Nationalists hear what sounds like a reasonable suggestion for elections before all-party talks can begin, these memories are a source of deep unease.

If that were not enough, there are very practical problems: census undercounts, residency requirements, election-district boundaries, and inadequate election monitoring. On March 22, Major presented a hybrid election proposal: no proportional representation; voting by election district with some at-large voting; and the opportunity to "top-up" the one-hundred participants by giving two places to any party of the leading ten not receiving sufficient votes to gain a place in a forum yet to be established. Voters would mark their party of choice, and the names of potential members would be listed, but not be voted on as individuals. Finally the link between the forum and the all-party negotiations remains obscure.

Hume's SDLP called the plan, "monster raving looney." Paisley say his DUP will split in three to get all the "top-up" votes. These elections are scheduled for May 30. A deadline for the all-party talks had once been set for the end of February. Now the governments are setting a date of June 10. (*Sinn Fein's* participation is to be contingent upon the reintroduction of a cease-fire.)

Elections rather than leading to all-party talks would seem to be sending them on a detour. Foreign Minister of the Republic, Dick Spring, has suggested talks modeled on the Dayton negotiations for the Balkans. More hope lies in that suggestion than in elections. Talks, then elections, would make more sense.

Loyalist paramilitaries have made it a point to call for calm among their members, even after Canary Wharf. The discipline and forbearance of those Loyalist groups up to this point has been something of a surprise, and also possibly a small sign of hope. The May 30 election could effectively exclude them. They too, need to be at the table for genuine all-party peace negotiaitons. □

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THE REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE

Dole, like Clinton, out of the loop

Wilson Carey McWilliams

After an anxious month or two, the Republican party is right where most of its leaders wanted it to be: the primary season, effectively, has come to an end, and Bob Dole, bleak but dead-safe, is assured of nomination. But like voters in general, Republicans aren't happy; their mood is fretful, and even the optimists among them, thinking ahead to November, have moments of dread.

A year ago, President Bill Clinton's fortunes were in the subbasement, and the greater part of the Republican establishment settled on Dole as a minimalist candidate, unlikely to make a mistake or confuse the party's basically negative message: beat the Clintons, vote Republican. Now, while Clinton is still no world-beater, his standing in the polls is respectable, and to make matters worse, the antinomies of the Republican coalition are making themselves felt, as commentators Theodore Lowi and E.J. Dionne, Jr., predicted they would. The Republicans need a new, unifying romance, but Bob Dole, whatever his other excellences, is not a candidate to catch hearts.

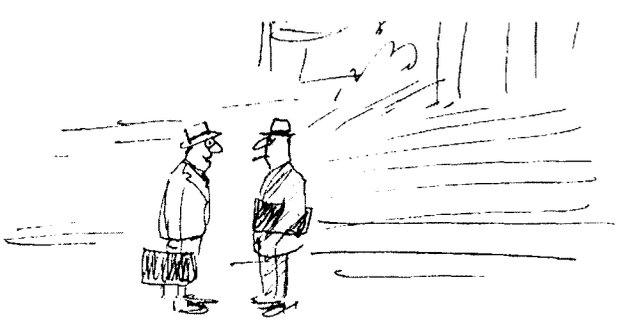
The dominant impression of Dole, at the moment, is that he is boring, out of touch, and possibly too old to be president. Every time Bob Dole campaigns, *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd observed, he seems to lose votes. His inarticulateness has become proverbial, and his campaign staff was driven to the expedient of keeping him away from debates. Dole won, in the end, chiefly because he was not Pat Buchanan, just as his best hope lies in the fact that, especially in his military and personal virtues, he is not Bill Clinton. Back in the legislative world where he is a master, Dole hopes to build a record of achievement—and provoke vetoes—sufficient to establish him as a man who can do what the president, at best, will only say, a Kansas Machiavelli championing honest action against unreliable speech.

Still, Michael Dukakis taught Democrats the risk of a candidate who offers "competence" without vision, even against an opponent who lacks Bill Clinton's fluency, and voters this year have been left with the sense that Dole has no very clear goals. Even the *New York Times*, not given to levity, poked fun at Dole's nine differing proclamations of "what this race is all about." Too many of his efforts to define the issues—his appeal to the future because it's "what lies before us," or his assertion, on the "Brinkley" show, that "something will pop up in November"—sound like drift or an opportunism greater than Clinton's.

Dole's habit of referring to himself in the third person, for example, suggests that he sees "Bob Dole," the public person, as an artifact quite distinct from the man himself. Of course, it's a familiar truth that politics requires the compromise or abandonment of old allegiances and lesser principles in the hope of a greater good, a reshaping of the self that is chancy. Bob Dole never had any illusions on that score: his family was Democratic, and he became a Republican to have a better chance of election. But the obvious risk, that political souls will lose themselves in their own contrivances, is the sound part of the distrust of "insiders." For Bob Dole, the price of Republicanism has increased dramatically in recent years as the party has lurched to the right. He and his wife changed churches, apparently deferring to conservative Protestant sensibilities; this year, he took the antitax pledge he once scorned; his position on abortion appears to be a form of periodical literature. Dole upholds principles from time to time, but his public persona seems increasingly ruled by a driving ambition that leads him to attempt any role that will please, however ill-suited to his somber nature. "I can be a Ronald Reagan," he told a campaign crowd, "if that's what you want."

No, he can't: at bottom, Bob Dole is too shrewd and too honorable to believe the lines that go with the part, and he delivers them without conviction, though he has every reason to envy Reagan's gift for enchantment.

Dole knows, of course, the advantages of moving toward the political center, which Clinton has been treating as his personal camp ground for some months now. Dole recognizes, too, that his age requires a running mate of extraordinary stature, hence his pursuit of General Colin Powell despite war



"Oh, my credibility could be worse. How's your credibility?"

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drums on the right and the risk of a slate—the first since McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt in 1900—where the nominee for vice-president overshadows the head of the ticket. Since Powell isn't playing, Dole will probably turn to governors like John Engler of Michigan or Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin. More venturesome possibilities, like Christie Whitman of New Jersey, lead straight into a political minefield.

The Republican right wing is restive, and Pat Buchanan is making third-party noises. Buchanan's threat is at least half bluster: He glories in the role of Republican rowdy, and he would leave the party only in the direst circumstances. Buchanan's followers, however, are another story. About 40 percent of Buchanan voters have been saying they're not inclined to support Dole, and this threat is especially credible in the case of "Reagan Democrats," who, without a firm Republican commitment on social issues, may decide to vote their economic interests. Dole's staff thinks so: two days after Super Tuesday, they had their candidate, in hard hat and French cuffs, playing to blue-collar conservatives.

Social conservatives in general, fobbed off with symbols during the Reagan and Bush years, have been unhappy with the low priority assigned to their favorite measures by Gingrich, Dole, and the Republican majorities in Congress. So far, Ralph Reed has played a crucial, conciliating role, keeping the Christian Coalition more or less neutral during the primaries, a position that hurt Buchanan and helped Dole, especially in the decisive contests in South Carolina and Georgia. And if it proves impossible to enact a socially conservative agenda, Reed is willing to work with probusiness and libertarian Republicans on the basis of the view, associated with Bill Kristol, that if government can be radically scaled down and decentralized, "civil society"—churches, families, voluntary associations, and local communities—will take up the slack, restoring America's moral order and sense of personal responsibility.

This argument is almost certainly false: capitalism is anything but conservative, following the relativism of the market, and trading tradition at a discount to desire. It's hardly news that economic and technological changes are weakening the institutions of civil society—undermining local community, shattering trust in the workplace, intruding on and reshaping family life. These days, as Robert Putnam says, Americans are increasingly apt to "bowl alone." Only a minority of social conservatives sees this clearly, but great numbers have an inkling, and much of the force behind Buchanan's candidacy lies in his half-articulate contention that the common good should rule rather than being subject to the logic of markets, that work and home are goods at least as important as a larger GNP. This sentiment limits Reed's freedom of maneuver, firing an insistence that Republicans pledge government support for traditional values, most obviously, the right to life. (The loathsome side of Buchanan's "movement," ready to enlist as storm troops for the "culture war," sees even less reason to compromise.) So Dole is not likely to take any decisive steps toward the center, especially since he is so indebted to Reed. The platform will probably stay where it is on abortion; Buchanan may get another chunk of convention prime time; and barring a change of heart by Powell, conservatives may have something close to a veto on the vice-presidential nominee.

The Right, though, isn't Dole's only problem. Ross Perot is again feeling tempted to run. Both Clinton and Dole are free traders, and protectionists will be looking for a champion. If Dole does keep to the right on social issues, moreover, it will open a lot of terrain in the center. Facing so many dangers and lacking magic, Dole will play it safe, waiting for his opponent to make a mistake.

On the Democratic side, however, Bill Clinton hasn't been making many. He has avoided any serious primary challenge, reflecting his own skill, but also his party's embattlement. Democrats are a smaller flock, more coherent and—thanks to Gingrich and the election of 1994—more inclined to see their fortunes tied to those of the party. Clinton and the Democrats have successfully portrayed themselves as our protectors against extremists, the defenders of Medicare, education, and the environment. The president has held out some lures for wandering conservatives—school uniforms, tough talk on immigration, a soft-pedal on affirmative action—and Whitewater, so far, is yesterday's news. Clinton has even been doing well with recent crises in foreign policy, treating Cuba and China firmly without being nutty and giving Israel decent support. In Bosnia, things are going as well as could be expected and the president even won an award as "Irish-American of the Year." Things could blow up at any time, of course, and even among his supporters, millions regard the president with resigned distaste; but at the moment, Clinton may be forgiven a little basking.

Still, Democrats need more than Clinton's unction. Where the economy is concerned, both Clinton and Dole seem out of the loop, barely aware of the fears and resentments that underlie the latest economic statistics. Neither has a credible program addressing the decline of job quality and real wages, the problems attendant on "downsizing," or the increasing inequality associated with a winner-take-all society. In New Hampshire, Bob Dole was moved to denounce "corporate greed," but seems to have left it at that. Clinton has supported a rise in the minimum wage and has begun to talk again about "fair" trade, but apart from support for retraining, his administration has not developed an industrial policy. (Senator Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, however, has given Democrats what looks like a decent beginning.)

Someone—the Democrats are still the best bet—needs to do better. Convinced that the burdens of change are not being fairly distributed, more and more Americans are sometimes desperate and often angry, depending on government and politics to give them an effective voice, yet not trusting established institutions to provide it. And regrettably, the election of 1996 has thus far not offered much to prove them wrong. □

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THE POET WHO FELL OFF THE MAP

Robert Lax on the island of Patmos

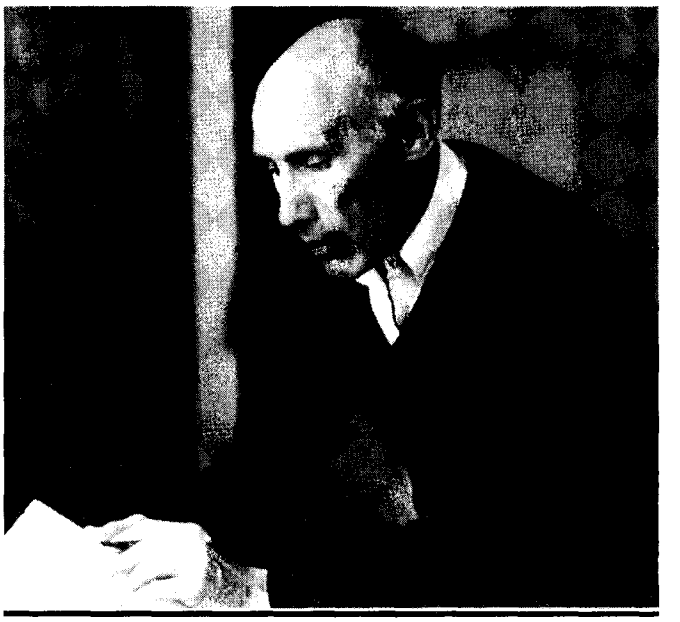
James Uebbing

Readers of *Commonweal* and *Jubilee* may remember the work of Robert Lax, but he is not generally known in the United States. As a poet he enjoys a considerably larger audience in Europe than in his native America, and even in Europe his status as a cult figure is obscure. Obscurity, in an elderly artist who has devoted a lifetime to his art, can indicate a good deal; there is the obscurity of the renegade, the pariah, and the failure. There is the obscurity of the timid and the obscurity of the self-assured. The obscurity of those, like Lax, who have simply chosen to be obscure is always to some degree a provocation, a story that calls attention to itself but allows few lessons to be drawn.

Those who have read Thomas Merton will know that Lax was part of Merton's Columbia circle: they will recall him as the shyest, quietest, and least self-conscious of Merton's overly articulate classmates, the one he describes in *The Seven Storey Mountain* as a "potential prophet, but without rage." Rage would certainly have been an issue at hand: social and political turmoil such as that suffered during the Depression and prewar years does not, as a rule, lend much support to the growth of the inner life, but at Columbia Merton and Lax managed not only to avoid the most unlovable moral responses to "that low, dishonest decade," but also to find a circle of friends who felt as perversely thrilled by, and estranged from, the contemporary world as they did themselves. Ad Reinhardt, Edward Rice, Robert Giroux, and John Berryman are the best-known of these today. Merton and Lax, almost from the start, were the closest.

The fame that Merton was to achieve through his autobiography, his later writings as a Trappist monk and hermit, and the bizarre circumstances of his accidental death in Bangkok in 1968 have made his story familiar, if not widespread, among contemporary Americans. Lax is a different case altogether. Whereas Merton found that his vocation as a Christian and a writer could only find expression within a world whose boundaries were drawn not merely by the church but by the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in the Kentucky hills, Lax has spent the better part of his life as rootless and expectant as a beggar. Born in Olean, a town in western New York State, he stayed on in Manhattan for some years after he left Columbia, but then began a long period of wandering, moving to New London, to North Carolina, to California, and Canada. Lax wrote continuously from his college days on, but it is too simple to say of him that he has always been a writer. He wrote for the *New Yorker*, *Time*, and Hollywood; he also went on the road with a circus, taught philosophy, coached boxers (without ever having boxed), and lived at Friendship House in Harlem. A frequent contributor to *Commonweal*, he was one of the founders of *Jubilee* ("a magazine of the church and her people"), and served for many years as its "roving editor." He eventually left America altogether in the late 1950s and has returned only infrequently and briefly. His main concern in leaving the States was to find someplace "quiet and inexpensive," and he finally settled on the Greek island of Patmos, where he lives today.

Nowadays Patmos is neither quiet nor cheap, but when Lax arrived it hadn't even a proper harbor and could barely sustain one small hotel. It is a rocky place, mountainous and extremely dry. Nearer to Turkey than to the Greek mainland, it is remote but far from desolate and has been a center of pilgrimage at least since the eleventh century, when the Monastery of Saint John was built hard by the cave where the Beloved Disciple, "in exile for the Word of God," wrote his Revelations. The monastery still dominates the island phys-



James Uebbing *is a critic and writer, and editor of the forthcoming* Love Had a Compass: Journals & Poetry *(Grove Press). This essay is excerpted from the introduction to that volume.*

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ically and imparts a peculiar tone to the place. Just beneath its ramparts, the old hill town of Chora looks down across the entire island; farther below, the shabbier port town of Skala stretches out against the waterfront. Lax lives in Skala.

Quite a number of people visit Patmos to visit Lax. During the summer especially, there is a small gathering of them—writers, students, fiancées—most evenings at Lax's little house overlooking the bay. This was how I first visited him in 1991. His verse had impressed me with its strangeness and restraint, and among my own friends at Columbia stories circulated, some fifty years past Lax's tenure, of the unknown poet who had fallen off the edge of the map somewhere in the Aegean. Poets tend to generate rumors and fantasies, and with Lax these generally reduced themselves to a kind of consensus that the man was a saint. Or, at least, a hermit.

He may be either or both, but these terms would need to be broken-in a good deal before they fit. Biography, to a large extent, is the explication of motive, and motives ought not to be guessed at too readily. It is not my intention here to provide a biography of Robert Lax. The solitary nature of his present life abroad, and the apparent restlessness of the years that led up to it, could suggest a good deal about him—from self-indulgence to outright misanthropy—that would be at once misleading and beside the point. Lax is not a recluse. Neither has he much in common with the many poor souls—from Paris to Patmos to Prague—who coddle their indolence abroad as expatriates. However vague the pattern of his life may appear, it cannot be missed entirely.

It is important to understand this. All the more so because Lax himself would be the last to insist upon it. Writers in general are loath to work out any equation of their lives, to supply a concordance that would match the elements of their experience to the form of their art, and who could ask otherwise? That is the job of their writing alone. But life, all life, becomes a narrative at some point, and a narrative needs to be told. Lax will tell you that he came to Patmos because there had been a picture of Saint John on the wall of his room in Marseilles. He lived in that room (in a cheap hotel) for months, and in the evening the very last rays of the sun would highlight this portrayal of the Apostle, busily writing in the cave of the Apocalypse. A simple response to a simple moment. Simple matters have formed the shape of Lax's life—a simplicity that is real enough to be disarming at first sight.

Marseilles itself is a case in point. In 1951 Lax traveled there by a roundabout course and spent some months or years—accounts vary—living among the layabouts and drifters of the old port. At thirty-six Lax had become used to roundabout courses, as had his friends, who knew better than to search out his plans too carefully. He had told them that in Marseilles he hoped to write some poems and "get to know poor folks."

Ostensibly, the idea was to establish some sort of hospice for the poor similar to Friendship House, where he had worked under the tutelage of its foundress, Catherine Doherty. It was an eminently practical scheme that, unsurprisingly, came to little. At Friendship House, Lax had become famous for his inability to wash floors with the right end of a mop, and in Marseilles he spent several days in a hotel before he realized that it was, in fact, a brothel. As things turned out, he succeeded in a small way: he lived among the poor as a poor man himself and became the center of a small group that met haphazardly for meals in his room at the Hotel du Calais. For the most part, however, Marseilles was an exercise in solitude rather than charity.

Perhaps this was what Lax himself had hoped for: certainly it would appear to have been precisely what he needed. The *fuga mundi* that carried him from America to Marseilles to Greece took place just as Lax was developing and settling into a newer and far more mature poetic voice, and there is every indication that what carried him abroad was not so much ennui or wanderlust as a profound inner need that he did not fully understand himself. The arch humor of his earlier verse—the *Fables*, for example, which had relied heavily on word play and comedy—was giving way to something quieter and less accessible, works whose center of gravity was more deeply internal and extremely subtle. The most distinctive features of Lax's style—the short lines of verse arranged in long columns, the deadpan narration, the highly abstract imagery—begin to take shape around this time.

Marseilles appears to have been a crucial force in this shift, and not simply through the happenstance of timing. When Lax made the decision to move abroad, he saw the city as a sinister zone. He had visited it years before while still a student and claims to have been so unnerved by the place—specifically, by a dark cafe near the railway station whose silent customers seemed ghoulish and malign to him in the evening shadows—that he turned and left within hours of his arrival. When Lax chose to leave America, then, it was not his idea to find someplace congenial but to return to someplace strange. It was another of the intimations by which he guided himself.

The most important thing to come out of Lax's time in Marseilles was *Port City*, a long verse narrative of his experience there. *Port City*, like *The Circus of the Sun*, is a poem of impressions and declamations: it exemplifies the metaphorical restraint to be found in most of Lax's work, the unwillingness to use words as allusions or indicators. When Lax avers that

i had
been coming
toward that
city
since
the beginning
of time

i had
been coming

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A Journey with Robert Lax

It was the early 1950s. I was a couple of years out of art school and still struggling to get established as an artist and graphic designer. Deeply influenced by the powerful waves of artistic expression coming from Europe—the work of Gill, Rouault, Waugh, Greene, Mauriac, Bernanos—I was intent on bringing Catholic art and graphics into the American mainstream.

A kindly editor at Sheed & Ward suggested I see two brilliant young men, Edward Rice and Robert Lax, who had just started a new Catholic picture magazine, *Jubilee*. Lax and Rice had surrounded themselves with talents like photographer Charles Harbutt and writers Richard Gilman and Ned O'Gorman. To my amazement, they actually commissioned my work (and paid for it!).

Lax, with his usual grave modesty, let me see his poetry. I had just spent my meager savings on a hand-printing press and some fonts of Gill's Perpetua. I offered to print some small chap books of his poetry. He actually trusted me to design and illustrate his work with total freedom and confidence in my artistic judgment. Heady stuff!

In 1958, I received a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation that enabled us to print a hardbound, limited edition of *The Circus of the Sun* and to establish our own publishing enterprise, Journeyman Press. (We were so commercially challenged that checks paying for the books went uncashed—we had neglected to open a bank account.)

Then, as now, poetry was not a cash cow, but every little bit went back into publishing Lax's poetry. Over the next twenty-five years, we went on to produce almost thirty publications (never again as luxuriously as *The Circus of the Sun*!). For me it was a golden opportunity to work in total freedom, visually interpreting magnificent poems. Even after Lax left to live in Greece, he would send batches of manuscripts and let me choose what to publish. I have never again experienced that feeling of trust and oneness of artistic intent.

Lax's work has gone on to receive the appreciation it deserves in Europe, but never here. Read his poems. Each word is a heart beat echoing your own, each poem a bird flying home to where the sky meets the sea.

EMIL ANTONUCCI

Emil Antonucci is Commonweal*'s designer.*

toward
that city
and singing
that city's
song

it is about as rhetorical as he will get, but even the rhetoric here encloses simple descriptive elements—the "song of the city," which is, after all, what Lax composes.

The impressionistic sequences are just as straightforward:

the stone quay
and the sound
of the waters

nets stretched
from the mast
to the bow

the silverbellied
fish
on racks
and
in baskets

the blackhaired
fisherwoman
and her pale son

wrinkled forehead
and flashing smile

Here the images are provided simply and direct, with few of the (real or implied) comparisons that a poetic voice will always contain. The austerity of this style is not merely verbal: the visual arrangement of the lines into "ladders" of verse serves to highlight the elements contained therein, as if to impress their importance upon us. This insistence upon patience, upon attention to trivialities is not an incidental element of design, for simplicity—its centrality as a human virtue and the necessity of its cultivation—is at the heart of Lax's achievement as a poet and a man.

Here, too, the contrast with Merton is of some note. Like Merton, Lax converted to Catholicism as a young man and—although it would be hard to describe him as a "Catholic poet" in the sense that one applies this term to Hopkins, Claudel, or even David Jones—his early verse, like Merton's, clearly shows the power that the church held over his imagination. For Lax, however, the doctrinal and aesthetic elements of Catholicism do not become a part of his craft: although there is an unmistakably religious framework surrounding such poems as "Jerusalem," for example, one would look through Lax in vain for something as overtly Catholic as the rhetoric and imagery of the English mystics (used to such good effect by Eliot in his *Four Quartets*) or the high-church nostalgia of the young Robert Lowell. In Lax's work Christianity does not intrude itself as either a social or a cultural force, and since (in literary terms) this

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is practically the only existence it has been granted in our day, it is likely that we may overlook it altogether.

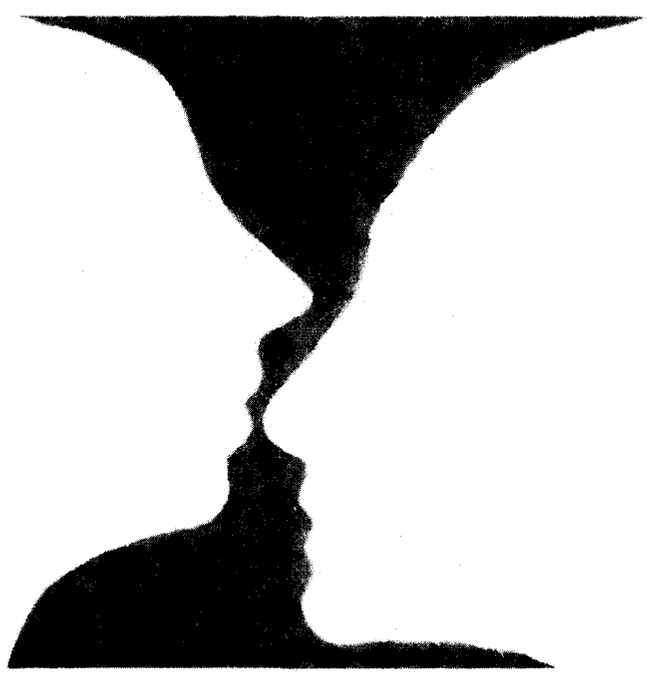
It is the core of his work all the same, and as it provides the only coherent context in which Lax can be read, we ignore it at our peril. In *The Circus of the Sun*, Lax supplies a genealogy for the whole of his art when he improvises on the prologue of Saint John's Gospel:

> And in the beginning was love. Love made a sphere:
> all things grew within it; the sphere then encompassed
> beginnings and endings, beginning and end. Love
> had a compass whose whirling dance traced out a
> sphere of love in the void: in the center thereof
> rose a fountain.

Here we are given not the voice of God but the vision of him; the voice belongs to Lax, who stands not so much in the guise of a creator as of a witness. This reticence of tone is typical, quite distinctive, and central to his work. It suggests an aesthetic sensibility somewhat at odds with the cult of the ego that still prevails among writers in our day and hints, in its lack of personality, at literary ambitions quite distinct from self-expression.

It is thus, for many reasons, impossible to consider Lax in strictly literary terms—as one might with Wallace Stevens, say, or Geoffrey Hill. The usual interplay between life and art, by which much of what we consider poetic form is created, does not appear in evidence. Lax's work generally takes the form either of transparent narratives—such as *Port City*—that do not attempt to disguise themselves as anything other than verse chronicles of actual events or opaque abstractions—*Sea & Sky*—that give no external display of personality whatsoever.

This is not a minor difference of style, still less an accidental reflection of the poet's temperament. There is a clear intent to Lax's simplicity, and if this is not understood the work itself will most likely come across as bland and noncommittal. In reality, almost everything that Lax has written since 1960 contains and forms a vast interior architecture that is itself as self-conscious and pointed as it is unobtrusive.



a moment: robert lax

Lax is a poet who does not wish to surprise. He makes very little use of metaphor, and much of his work is almost devoid of imagery as well. The concrete poems are the best illustration of this: something as abstract as

> red
> red
>
> blue
> blue
>
> yellow
> yellow

is obviously not attempting to work against the reader's sentiment, and cannot operate against the reader's intelligence as well. As unspecific as it is—and this is in many way typical of Lax—it can barely even work on the level of suggestion, since a color could suggest various and dissimilar things.

With Lax it is necessary to put aside the very notion of interpretation, the expectation—so basic to us that it is barely recognizable as a strategy—that an author's art will by its nature be linear and syllogistic. We have long since become used to a poetry and a literature that make small claims on the understanding, and it did not take the modernists to break our confidence in the ability of words to correspond with our interior and concrete realities in any exact way. It is less apparent, however, that those who read and write poetry today feel that the present situation calls for any diminishment in the authority of the poet. If anything, the cult of personality seems to flourish under the current circumstances, in which the assertion of the self and the self's desires have become nearly the whole object and soul of poetry.

The example of Robert Lax is bound to prove unsettling to anyone whose sensibilities have been formed along these lines, because his approach is frankly antithetical to such an elevation of personality. *Port City* will suggest a great deal about its author, as will *The Circus of the Sun*, but in these works it is not possible to establish a strict equation of the author with the poet. This cannot be an accident of design. Lax is no less a spectator than we: the jugglers and the con men and the shrine of Notre Dame de la Garde are as unfamiliar to him as they are to us, and while he is far from indifferent to them there is no real attempt on his part to induce his response in his audience. Indeed, his own response is itself either invisible to us or is offered with a reticence that makes few demands upon our credibility. Even the "interior" sequences of *Port City*, such as the magnificent final passage in which Lax declares

> that all
> indeed

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was real

all had
history
and a
name

(as though
the moment
had been
rapt beyond
itself
and was eternal
while it
moved
in time)

i saw
each object
then in
its relation
(to a
timeless
being)

and my
heart
sang
(but kept
its deepest
peace)

are offered almost as an aside, and are kept so clearly distinct from the main body of the work that they seem almost to arise from some other source than the events and people that comprise the poem.

And perhaps they do. In the world of Robert Lax, cause and effect are murky concepts, hardly nonexistent but not ubiquitous and somehow beside the point in the end. The elements of his art are the elements of the created world: the sea and the men and the animals and the light. Like every artist he makes his use of them, but unlike most he acknowledges that they do not belong to him. They find their origin elsewhere. It is in this respect that Lax must be acknowledged as a religious man, insofar as for him artistic creation is not a ransacking of the visible world or an assertion of some unfettered consciousness so much as it is a participation in a process that was already in motion long before he arrived on the scene.

In his autobiography, Mark Van Doren wrote of Lax that "his chief woe...was that he could not state his bliss: his love of the world and of all things, all persons in it. He continues to try." Certainly this is borne out in his verse, and it will be apparent to anyone who has read Lax that Van Doren was able, with a clarity and directness that seem to be the special preserve of teachers, to touch upon the real drama that his old student had begun to enact. It has been enacted obscurely and quietly in a variety of out-of-the-way locales, but it has continued and continues to this day. □

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Richard Alleva

SLICED & DICED

'Richard III' & 'Othello'

There is a subgenre of science-fiction called "alternative universes," exemplified by such novels as Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, in which the United States groans under the yoke of the victorious Axis powers, and Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*, with its portrayal of an England that never experienced the Reformation. The most interesting thing about the new film version of *Richard III*—adapted by and starring Ian McKellen and directed by Richard Loncraine—is that it presents Shakespeare's play as taking place in just such an alternative universe. The England in which the York family seizes the throne from the Lancasters only to be decimated by its own most infamous member, Richard Gloucester, the hunchback from hell, here assumes the aspect of fascist dictatorships between the world wars. The York regalia is Nazi-like, with the family insignia, a wild boar, substituting for the swastika. This is a country in which Oswald Mosley would have flourished and Edward VIII could have felt free to admit that he found fascism almost as attractive as Mrs. Simpson. This is a London where tanks outnumber taxis, where noblemen in trenchcoats visit proletarian assassins in their tenement homes and dicker about the price of murder over cups of tea fetched by the missus. Whatever the flaws of this adaptation (based on a Royal Shakespeare production directed by Richard Eyre), it does have many striking moments inspired by the need to recast the play in a twentieth-century setting of power politics and machine guns. The treachery and lovelessness of a world in which brother murders brother here takes on the peculiar dreariness and metallic taste of our century.

I will long remember:

McKellen delivering the first part of Richard's famous soliloquy, "Now is the winter of our discontent," as a victory speech at a York banquet, right after a big band singer finishes her number, "Come live with me and be my love."

Richard watching his own coronation on film in the palace screening room while he murmuringly plots with henchmen the destruction of the little princes in the Tower.

Anne, Richard's wife, popping pills and injecting herself with heroin to dull the horror of being married to a monster.

Perhaps the best image of all is the last one: Richard falling backward off a high platform into the flames of battle below and shrieking with laughter all the way down, while on the soundtrack Jolson sings "I'm sitting on top of the world." (Surely this was inspired by Cagney's fiery finish in *White Heat*—"On top of the world, Ma!")

But such visual fizz constitutes the one real triumph of this film, aside from Jim Broadbent's superb Duke of Buckingham. For the most part, this film lacks real dramatic power because it never takes on the real challenges of the play.

Richard III is a melodrama, not a tragedy. Unlike Macbeth, Richard never changes, and his soliloquies aren't so much self-inspections as verbal dances of self-delighting deviltry. Yet the play isn't static, for nearly every scene is a dramatic stunt in which we watch the loathsome hero pull off some feat of deception or manipulation. How far can he get? we keep asking ourselves. Always further than seems possible.

The paradigmatic scene is Richard's successful wooing of Lady Anne over the dead body of her husband, whom Richard murdered. (In the original text, it is the body of her father-in-law, whom Richard also murdered.) That we accept its outcome is due not to Shakespeare finessing the irrational but to his confronting it head on. Throughout most of the scene Anne verbally attacks while Gloucester parries every thrust. At each parry the woman's capacity for fury dwindles. He never deceives her about his guilt, but, more insidious, so thoroughly undermines her view of herself as righteously raging widow that, when offered a sword and permission to kill Richard, she can't do it. What would have defied our belief at the beginning

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of the scene wins credence at its conclusion.

But Shakespeare's passage to this conclusion is gradual and carefully graded, and so must be its staging and enactment. It's not necessary to leave the text unabridged. Olivier cut strenuously for his 1955 adaptation, but he approached each tune, each twist carefully and gave it its due. You saw Lady Anne take Gloucester's lure, and you saw the trap shut with chilling finality.

The current version gives us not a rendering of the wooing but an abstract. A few insults, a little pleading, the blade offered and refused, the engagement ring slipped onto the lady's finger. Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am. The incredible remains incredible and the scene goes for nothing. Given the fact that director Loncraine sets wooing in the mortuary of an army hospital, with the corpses of soldiers all around, Anne's surrender could have been played as a desperate lunge at life after the trauma of war. But this notion isn't elucidated by either acting or staging. Richard's sexual magnetism might have been the deciding factor, but sexual magnetism is something that Ian McKellen, a clever actor, does not possess in abundance. His dapper, mustachioed villain is an adequate representation of, say, Black Michael in *The Prisoner of Zenda* or some other subsidiary villain in a swashbuckler or spy flick, but Shakespeare's egregious monster he most certainly isn't. And that points to what's wrong with this film. It's a clever feat which vividly pictures an England that never was, but it skims a story that works only when laid out for us in fascinating detail.

Reviewing Olivier's version, the critic and scriptwriter Paul Dehn wrote, "Wherever the play was loose-jointed or ill-fitting, Sir Laurence has been its tinker and its tailor, but never once its butcher." Alas, McKellen and Loncraine have sliced and diced.

There are also several striking and suggestive images in Oliver Parker's version of *Othello*, but they don't cohere. The directorial ideas stay fugitive because there is no central concept to hold them together. There is no convincing sense of place in this movie. There is no world. In that respect this movie is inferior to *Richard III*.

And an *Othello* without a proper Moor is as lame as a *Hamlet* without the prince. This is odd because Iago is on stage almost twice as long as his general and is by far the showier role. Nevertheless, midway through the story, if the black general doesn't explode, or at least sizzle, the play never happens. An Othello who burns like ice might be provocative, but Laurence Fishburne is merely as cold as a spring drizzle, delivering his lines in the manner of an English professor reading the text to a mildly bored class. Bernard Shaw was right when he observed that any actor playing the Moor "must have the orchestral quality in him." But Fishburne hath no such music.

The rest of the cast ranges from adequate to excellent with Kenneth Branagh contributing an Iago so radically perverted that he seems to think he is doing the right thing when he works havoc. Weirdly enough, Branagh comes close to being the "honest Iago" that his victims take him for, and the ambiguity makes this performance much more disturbing than the usual Machiavellian slyboots characterization of the ensign. But the play is called *Othello*, not *Iago*.

Both of these films will soon be available on video. But if you're planning to celebrate Shakespeare's birthday on April 23, see if your library or video store has Olivier's *Richard III* or Orson Welles's *Othello*. These are movies that don't shrink or scramble Shakespeare but instead expand cinema to contain the bard. □

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Why Chicago worked

The Lost City
Discovering the Forgotten Virtues of Community in the Chicago of the 1950s
Alan Ehrenhalt
Basic Books, $24, 310 pp.

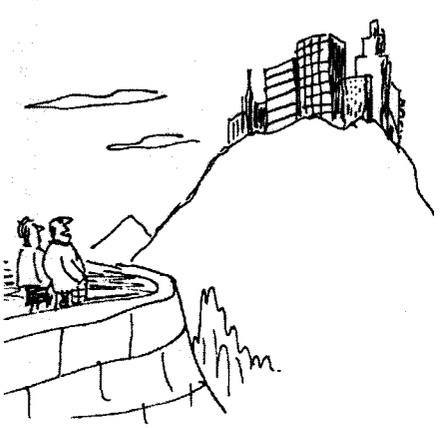
John T. McGreevy

Next time a politician, business executive, or educator uses the word "community" as an all-purpose salve for the latest crisis, hand her a copy of *Lost City*, Alan Ehrenhalt's bracing examination of three Chicago neighborhoods during the 1950s. Ehrenhalt does not want to abandon the term, but he argues that "community" depends upon the ability of authority figures to restrict choices, and that a culture suspicious of leadership in all forms will find it difficult to create communities more meaningful than a health club.

Ehrenhalt begins by probing the folkways of Chicago during the tailfin age. He concludes that choice remained an elusive commodity, most poignantly for African-Americans attempting to live outside the city's ghetto or women searching for rewarding work outside the home. To a lesser extent, however, all Chicagoans lived in a world that restricted choice, feeling considerable pressure to send their children to the neighborhood school, keep their money in a checking account at the corner bank, and patronize the closest grocery store. If Chicago Cubs' star Ernie Banks wanted to continue playing baseball, he had to accept whatever contract management decided to offer him, just as lieutenants in the Daley machine knew that disloyalty was the direct route to political oblivion. Corporations sank roots in particular communities instead of perpetually negotiating for a better tax break in a neighboring area.

Authority, by contrast, was rarely in short supply. In the most compelling of his neighborhood sketches, Ehrenhalt examines a square-mile chunk of the city's southwest side dominated by Saint Nick's Catholic parish and a nearby Nabisco plant. The consistent theme is the overlapping sets of restrictions on individual behavior. Nabisco provided steady employment, for example, but also sent nurses to check on employees taking sick days. Local politicians excelled at constituent service but brooked little substantive debate about local issues. Priests ran the various altar society and Holy Name groups with an iron hand even as nuns exercised similar control over the parochial school. Children on neighborhood streets understood that all adults (not just their parents) felt entitled to report misbehavior to parents, priests, and nuns.

Life in the city's African-American section moved to similar rhythms. Prominent pastors and newspaper editors confidently assumed that part of their responsibility was to force recent migrants from the South to adopt middle-class standards of respectability and decorum. An impressive array of social groups and political clubs knitted the burgeoning African-American middle class into a series of crisscrossing networks. In suburban Elmhurst, Ehrenhalt's third example, peer pressure pushed women into the PTA and men into the leadership of Boy Scout troops, while both parents and teachers seemed less interested in educational issues than the attempt to stamp out bad posture, long hair (on boys), and gum chewing.



"It's one of the **better** *communes!"*

Among the many virtues of Ehrenhalt's analysis is his nuanced sympathy for the authority figures struggling to create order in Saint Nick's, African-American Chicago, and Elmhurst. Popular accounts of the 1950s, as Ehrenhalt knows, view the period through the civil rights and women's movements so crucial to distinguishing that time from our own. Complacency about discrimination defines the decade, along with the supposed conformity and false pieties of suburban life. The Catholic variant of this line of analysis is to describe the parishes of the 1950s as nothing more than authoritarian, adding well-worn anecdotes about tyrannical nuns.

Ehrenhalt cannot deny these narratives—women and African-Americans did endure discrimination, some nuns were tyrannical—so he wisely doesn't try. Instead he focuses on the value of organizations, with all their flaws, and their importance for sustaining livable cities. The problem with this strategy is that Ehrenhalt underplays the historical forces, notably racial segregation, shaping not only the African-American ghetto but all-white Saint Nick's and Elmhurst. The advantage is a subtle

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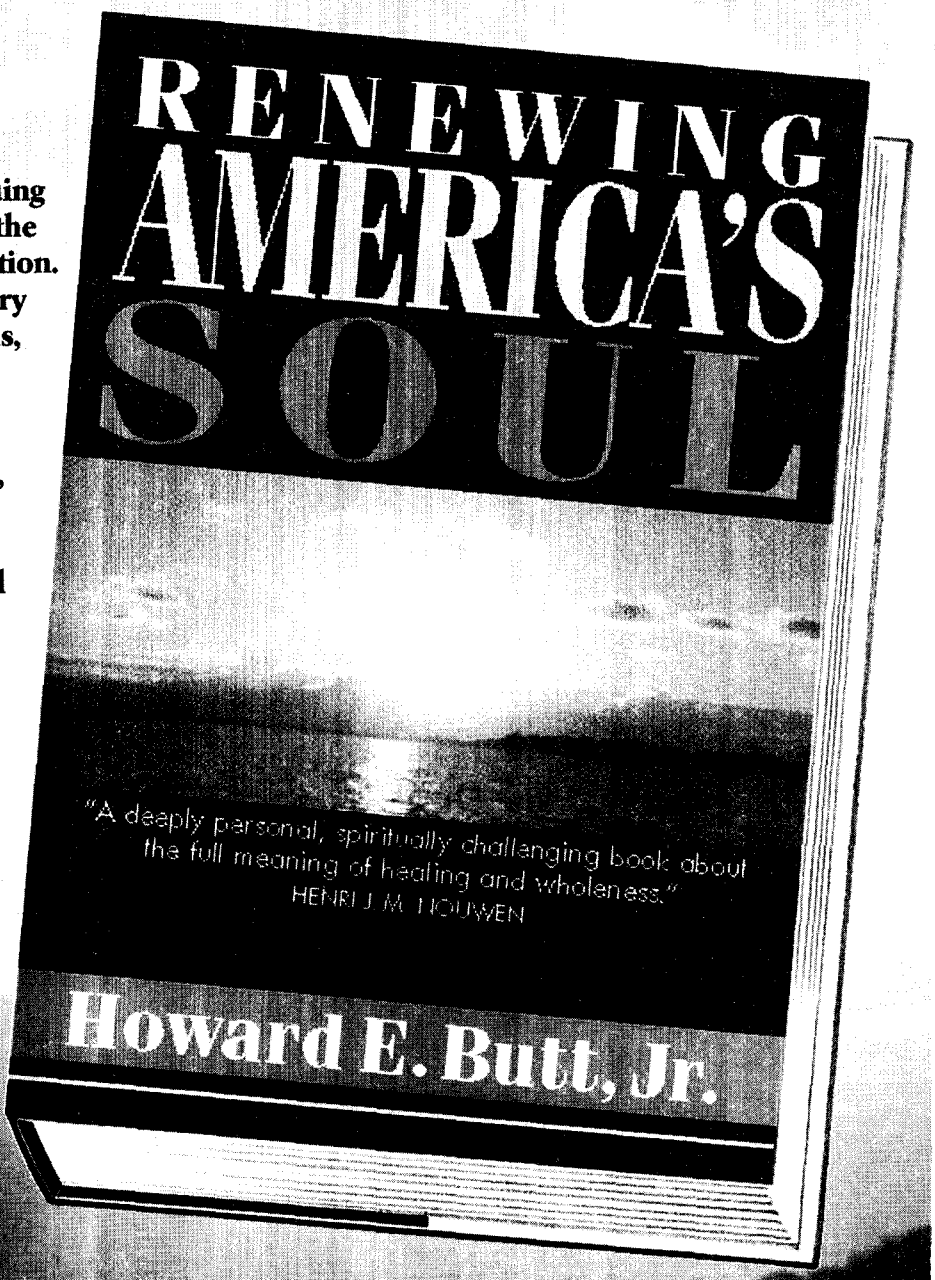
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understanding of a community life more easily mocked than appreciated. The relentless interest of Elmhurst PTA members in the minutiae of high school life, for example, might strike contemporary readers as comical, but today's high school principals might welcome any parental interest, let alone an organization forced to schedule both afternoon and evening meetings. *Lost City* is a hymn to this institutional creativity, the ability to sustain the PTAs, Boy Scout troops, and Holy Name Societies that enabled citizens to share more with their neighbors than a zip code.

Exactly how to rebuild (or invent) neighborhood institutions in a new age remains the unanswered question. Ehrenhalt does speculate that once the babyboomers quit rebelling against the sadistic gym teachers of their youth a younger generation will reverse course. "The 1930s and 1940s not only produced real communitarian values," he argues, "but generated real leaders and authority figures whose arrival appeared as unlikely in the individualist era of the 1920s as it does amid the individualism of the 1990s."

Unfortunately, evidence for a shift toward communitarian values is at the moment fairly thin, especially as so-called conservatives trumpet the market as the solution to a range of social problems. The structural barriers are also formidable. Chicagoans spend more time on the job than a generation ago, with professional workers concerned about layoffs and blue-collar laborers making up for a persistent drop in real wages by taking second jobs or working more hours. And too, the mass entrance of women into the paid labor force has eliminated the most important source of 1950s-era volunteer energy. (A 7 A.M. men's Holy Name breakfast at Saint Nick's, for example, meant women frying bacon in the parish kitchen at 5 A.M.)

More specifically, the understandable movement of the African-American middle class away from the most severe ghettos has further weakened the social structure of areas beset by poverty and discrimination. In Elmhurst, the Jaycees and the Presbyterian church so central to community life of the 1950s play a less prominent public role. Parishioners at Saint Nick's struggle to sustain the institutions built during the 1950s, while presumably sharing in the general frustration with church teaching connected to gender and sexuality.

Answering the questions the book so eloquently raises, however, would unduly burden *Lost City*. Ehrenhalt's considerable achievement is to remind us of the historical importance of neighborhood institutions at a moment when the dominant impulse is to go it alone. □

John T. McGreevy *teaches history at Harvard.*

DELIVER US FROM EVIL

All God's Children
The Bosket Family and the American Tradition of Violence
Fox Butterfield
Alfred A. Knopf, $27.50, 389 pp.

Jean Bethke Elshtain

Willie Bosket, the protagonist of this disturbing book, is reputed to be the most dangerous man currently being held in the New York State prison system. When he was fifteen years old, Willie was convicted of a double murder. As a minor (the law was subsequently changed), he was sentenced to five years in a training facility. Released when he turned twenty-one, Willie was soon back in prison where he will likely remain, largely in solitary confinement.

In a book that evokes pity and terror, Fox Butterfield succeeds wonderfully well—despite his occasional flat prose—in detailing the history of the Bosket family's tradition of violence. He does much less well with what he tendentiously calls the "American tradition of violence." Moving from the particulars of the Boskets to generalities about America, the argument grows strained, the analogies fall apart, the book seems awkwardly cobbled together. This imperfect fit of one story into a Very Big Story occupies much of the first part. By the time Butterfield gets to the real meat of his story, the "American tradition" is pretty much left behind and the reader is drawn ever deeper into a truly awful tale of family ruin.

Who is Willie Bosket? A violent boy who turned into a even more violent young man and who is in prison for life. He possesses an IQ at the genius level as well as a convict father who also murdered and with whom he never had a relationship until Willie began a correspondence from his own prison cell. Willie's mother, despite Butterfield's attempts to suggest she was doing her best under difficult circumstances, seems clearly disturbed and drawn to relationships with violent men. Consequently, Willie's upbringing was no upbringing at all but a kind of minimally contained unleashing of a hostile kid into the world. First sent to reform school at age nine after he tried to kill a pregnant teacher by throwing a typewriter out of a school window at her, no

> reformatory or mental institution could hold him for long. He assaulted his social workers with scissors or metal chairs, set other inmates on fire, or escaped by driving off in state vehicles....By the age of fifteen, Willie claimed he had committed two thousand crimes, including two hundred armed robberies and twenty-five stabbings....In the spring of his fifteenth season, Willie shot and killed two men on the subway in Manhattan...."I shot people, that's all," he said. "I don't feel nothing."

What's a society to do with a violent young man who kills people, that's all?

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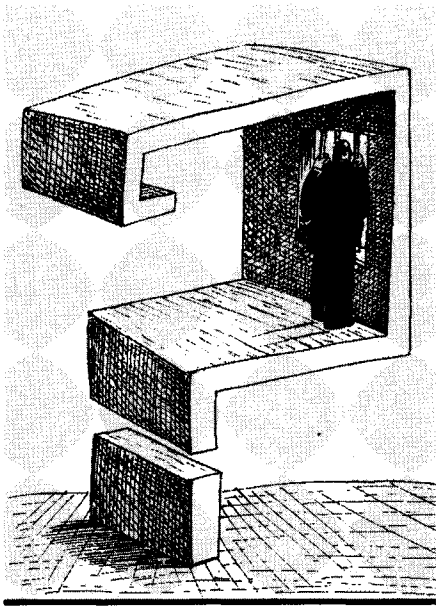
Butterfield's book, whatever its intent, suggests that we can, at best, incarcerate him in order to spare others from his depredations. This is not the way nice people are supposed to talk. But the nice folks in this story at times seem extraordinarily out of touch, unwilling to really come to grips with and to fathom the depth of young Bosket's destructiveness. "The Boy No One Could Help," is the title of one of Butterfield's chapters. Alas, this seems true.

Bosket came up through the juvenile system at a time when major reforms in New York were underway (under Peter Edelman) that had, as their aim, keeping kids in communities—community, notes Butterfield, got repeated over and over "like a mantra from the late sixties." The upshot was to shunt Bosket around and send him back to a "community" (which was no community at all) where he stabbed, robbed, and assaulted again and again. A canny social worker of the old school who argued against permissive treatment was reprimanded and labeled a "troublemaker." Astonishingly, from time to time there were those who seem actually to have been gulled and who proclaimed Bosket "rehabilitated," with the head of one facility declaring to a PBS documentary team that Willie was a "great model of our rehabilitative efforts."

This is a terrible story, terrible for reasons Butterfield details and for reasons he does not. Why does a liberal society have such difficulty coming to grips with the reality of human evil? Why are we caught up so short when we come across individuals who really are destructive, who approach others as a predator does prey, who are missing something in their moral make-up that would enable them to recognize the humanity of others? These are questions one wishes Butterfield had taken up, but he does not.

The final chapter is titled "Willie: A Monster Created by the System." Butterfield seems to half-believe this. It is, of course, Willie's own plaint. But who or what is this "system"? If we go too far in the direction of understanding without judgment, we begin to excuse and wind up in exculpatory strategies that



can never hold any single person responsible for much of anything. In fact, it diminishes the accomplishments of the tens of thousand of men, women, and children who live in poverty and tough conditions who do not become Willie Boskets, who do not stab, assault, and kill.

The story of the Boskets is not primarily a story of poverty. It is a story of something gone truly haywire, a story of violent impulse. Butterfield tiptoes up to this question when he notes, in his "Epilogue," that the

> overwhelming majority of adults who commit violent crimes, started very young. They were impulsive, aggressive, irritable children who would not obey their parents, bullied their neighbors, and acted out when they got to school ....After age seven or eight, their cases seem intractable. This was the pattern with Butch [Willie's father] and Willie.

Clearly, then, we are dealing with certain predispositions. Whether the child's immediate environment is disordered or decent will work its way on these predispositions. But we put everyone at risk if we don't recognize that there really are violent people in the world—that is their identity—and we cannot cure them. The best we can do, under the Augustinian dictum to do no harm, is to try to protect others from them and to treat them, within a situation of confinement and control, with as much decency and respect as possible. But one doesn't release them into the world.

As I indicated above, Butterfield fails in his attempt to link the Boskets to an "American tradition of violence." What could that tradition be? Remarkably, Butterfield locates it in the "dictates of honor...beloved of antebellum white South Carolinians," a code he claims has now been "transmuted into the strictures of the street...." There may be a case to be made along these lines, but Butterfield hasn't made it. To make a giant segue, without compelling historic evidence of direct continuity, from the "proud culture that flourished in the antebellum rural South" to the horrors of kids killing kids, is asking the reader to make an unjustified leap of faith. Even if one accepts Butterfield's account of "Bloody Edgefield," South Carolina, where distant Bosket ancestors trace their origins (and I have no reason to doubt it although he does layer hyper-

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bole on hyperbole), there are problems in attributing direct causality. For one thing, the duels and battles fought by hot-blooded South Carolinians were between adult men, with each party to the dispute armed and following a ritualized code. This old code of honor, unlike current notions of respect or "dissing," was bound up with relationships that held a thick social web intact. However misguidedly, "honor" was about protecting something. The perceived insult to a lady's virtue or a man's honor, for example, suggested that the offended woman or man's word was not to be trusted. That the eighteenth-century South Carolina back country might have been unusually contentious and violent is certainly plausible. But ten-year-olds didn't roam around killing other ten-year-olds or stabbing sleeping men.

The current street code arises out of broken relations and further severs all ties. Who is being protected? Butterfield makes it clear that Willie honored no close ties to anyone who crossed him, or seemed to cross him. There may well be an "American tradition of violence," but it isn't compellingly presented in *All God's Children*. How, then, are we to account for the many violent children whose ancestry does not flow from the Southern code of "honor"? More toughmindedly, it makes sense to look at relatively recent historic developments that undermine any authentic community: the domestic arms race, the corrosion of whole neighborhoods by drugs, especially crack cocaine (a relatively recent development), loss of decent jobs for unskilled workers, forms of urban renewal, and, most importantly, the breakdown of the inner-city black family. There is no doubt—none whatsoever—that children, especially young men, from homes without fathers, are more at risk for every possible harm, both as sufferers and perpetrators. Recognizing that reality would take us a lot further toward understanding Willie Bosket than does the etiquette of eighteenth-century duels. □

Jean Bethke Elshtain *is the author of* Democracy on Trial *(Basic Books).*

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

Lewis Carroll
A Biography
Morton N. Cohen
Alfred A. Knopf, $35, 577 pp.

Robert Murray Davis

This book deals less with the works of the pseudonymous Lewis Carroll than with his creator, the Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, who, in turn, sounds like one of the quirkier characters of Vladimir Nabokov. He was very fond of female children, preferring them to grown women who were less trusting or more demanding of qualities and prospects he could not offer. Moreover, as a pioneering child photographer, he took nude pictures which occasioned some disapproval, though not as much as one might expect.

Like Nabokov's Humbert Humbert, Dodgson's obsession was doomed, if not tragic. As the girls grew older, they became unsuitable as models for reasons of propriety as well as taste, and unsatisfactory as friends because they moved beyond the games, tricks, and stories with which he had held their attention.

The ingenuity with which he constructed these lures was also Nabokovian. His "Doublets" anticipates "word golf" in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, a novel which, like Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno*, has a bewildering structure and even an index. Dodgson applied mathematics and logic, his two major academic fields, to everything conceivable, including seeding for tennis tournaments and electoral reform. He had a childish love of toys and gadgets, many—including a device which allowed him to write under the bedcovers in the dark—of his very own invention. Were he alive, he would be the king of computer nerds.

Besides all this, he was a deacon in the Anglican church, perhaps because taking orders was a condition of his holding his first and most permanent Oxford appointment. Liberal in theology—he implicitly rejected the doctrine of Original Sin and explicitly rejected that of eternal damnation for sinners—he was horrified at any hint of levity about religion. But he refused to condemn the theater, befriended many actresses, including some beyond the age of consent, and helped to found the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He wrote about these and many other subjects and kept up a correspondence that, in the last thirty years of his life, included nearly a hundred thousand letters sent and received. He continually reproached himself for idleness and unworthiness.

The picture created by these superficial details, especially the attraction to young girls, is obviously open to sensational or solemn probings of Dodgson's psychosexual problems. Cohen has avoided the extremes because he realizes that, as Evelyn Waugh put it, his subject was "an extreme but perfectly intelligible type of his age and class."

Dodgson was a High Victorian. Born in the year of the first Reform Bill as the eldest son in a clergyman's large family, he died in the year of the Diamond Jubilee. Imperialist without thinking much about it, he remained insular save for one trip to Russia. He was conservative in politics, especially academic politics, where he fought most suggestions of change, including those of Dean Liddell, father of the Alice who was the inspiration of and audience for his most enduring tales. His concern for the weak and helpless was Dickensian, based on sentiment rather than coherent ideas about society. In fact, his favorite authors were the Romantics, Tennyson, and Dickens. His serious poetry and much of his voluminous correspondence seem cloyingly sentimental or embarrassingly facetious to modern readers.

Rather than defending or blaming Dodgson for his tastes and behavior,

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Cohen provides the context in which they can be understood. In the process, he demonstrates that the Victorians were very different from you and me. Thus, while he speculates about the source of Dodgson's love of young girls, he does not attempt to account for it. Instead, he explains the sources and dimensions of the Victorian cult of the child and the belief, held by Dodgson and many parents, that young girls were by definition safe with respectable-looking older men. (He was horrified at public revelation of the traffic in young virgins, thinking them inflammatory, and wanted to bowdlerize Bowdler to render Shakespeare suitable for young girls.)

Cohen's broader picture of Victorian life and institutions is even more successful. He not only explains the hierarchy and examination system of Oxford but creates a picture, not unlike that in the early pages of *Brideshead Revisited*, of what the day-to-day life was like. He is lucid on the theological divisions within the Church of England, and is especially good on F. D. Maurice and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, two of the major influences on Dodgson's religious thought.

At times, one could wish that Cohen were not so deeply immersed in Victorian writing, for it has affected his diction. He begins the chapter on the Alice books with "It had to happen." Supposed but undocumented crucial events are presented in a barrage of conditionals, rhetorical questions, exclamations ("But wait"), comments ("one shudders"), and clichés ("The die was cast" and "The rest is history" in the same paragraph).

Cohen is even more familiar with Dodgson's archival material—he edited a large portion of it—than with Victorian social history. Readers may feel that he is too deeply immersed, since he quotes diaries and letters not just to illustrate Dodgson's interest in an idea or person but to record, as with the Liddell family, every single mention.

The pace of the book is further slowed by its organization. Cohen claims that, with a few exceptions, he proceeds chronologically, but most chapters are organized rather loosely by topic. This leads to a confusing welter of dates and considerable repetition of details and even quotations from one section of the book to another.

Still, this is a careful and balanced account of a man's life, concluding with a value judgment that "there is something noble, selfless, and generous in what Charles Dodgson fashioned of himself and in the way he reined in his impulses and set them to serve his family, his young friends, his society, his God—and himself." In the days of prosecutorial biographies like Michael Selden's on Graham Greene and Martin Stannard's on Evelyn Waugh, actually liking one's subject is so old-fashioned as to seem revolutionary. □

Robert Murray Davis *is the author of a memoir,* Mid-Lands: A Family Album *(University of Georgia Press).*

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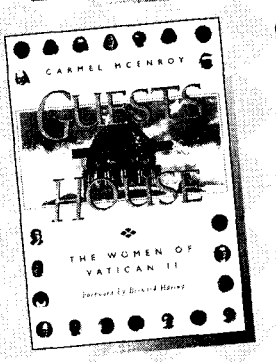

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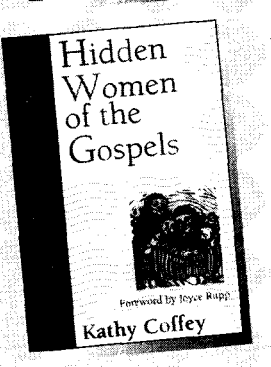

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Jihad vs. McWorld
Benjamin R. Barber
Times Books, $25, 381 pp.

Paul E. Sigmund

The jarring title notwithstanding, this is a significant book. It juxtaposes two countervailing tendencies in the contemporary world, the universalizing tendencies of global capitalism and the particularizing drives of religious, tribal, and ethnic fanaticism, and argues that both are undermining the fragile structures of democracy.

The first part on the emergence of "McWorld" documents the expansion of a homogenizing, American-dominated worldwide consumer culture. A media mogul like Australian-born Rupert Murdoch, beside owning *TV Guide*, Twentieth Century Fox films, HarperCollins Publishers, and the New York *Post*, controls television chains in the U.S., Britain, and Hong Kong that broadcast to two-thirds of the world's population. U.S. films comprise all or nearly all the ten top-grossing films in every major country except Mexico (six out of ten), Italy, and Japan (five out of ten). In Germany, American-made films have moved from 53 percent of the market in 1981 to 83 percent today. Eighty percent of the films shown in Europe are American, while only 2 percent of those shown in the U.S. come from Europe. Satellite dishes proliferate in China, despite government opposition, and they receive CNN, MTV, and the BBC news, the last pulled by Murdoch at the request of the Chinese government. Imitations of American trash TV appear in Britain, the Russians do a ripoff of "Wheel of Fortune" and a dubbed version of the real thing reaches 70 percent of Poland's viewers. Honda boasts both of being the import car of the year, and having 80 percent American components, while the Dodge Stealth is built in Nagoya, Japan.

Spokesmen for several U.S. administrations have seen the expansion of global capitalism as linked positively to democracy. However, Barber argues that "Market Leninism" in China and successful capitalist tyrannies in Chile, South Korea, and Singapore disprove the link, and that "capitalists may be democrats but capitalism does not need or entail democracy."

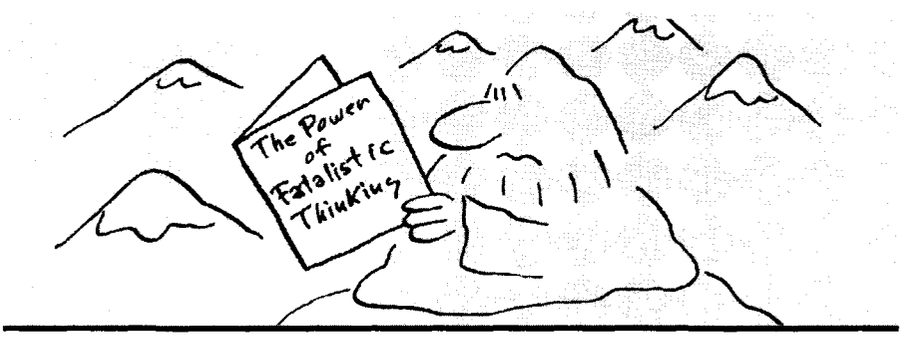
Consumer choice, often manipulated by the media, is not the same thing, says Barber, as the autonomous decision making of the democratic citizen. (Barber does not mention the role of mass communications such as the fax machine and CNN in the ending of authoritarianism in Chile and Eastern Europe, and in the events of Tiananmen Square in China in 1989.)

The second part of the book examines "dogmatic and violent particularism"—Barber's definition of *Jihad*—around the world. Besides Israeli and Islamic extremists and the warring ethnicities of the former Yugoslavia, there are the Irish, the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Basques and Catalans in Spain, and the many ethnic groups of the former Soviet Union. Less extreme but still divisive are the German Swiss, the East Germans, and the French Canadians. Each is reviewed for its explosive divisiveness. Not included, because in most cases they have been defeated or have lost their revolutionary faith, are the Marxist-inspired guerrillas who were active in nearly every country of Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s.

Barber admits that religion can be compatible with democracy and alludes to Tocqueville's claim that it was a prerequisite for its effective functioning. Yet he is dubious about the possibility of a reconciliation between Islam and democracy similar to that which had taken place in Christianity. He seems to believe that there is little difference between Islamic and Christian fundamentalisms in terms of their opposition to democratic practices. "Both want to be born again so as to be born yesterday," that is, before the advent of modernity with its acquisitiveness, individualism, and secularization, for which the spiritual poverty of the market is partly to blame. And Waco and Oklahoma City show that the weapons of holy war are not exclusively Islamic.

In the long run, Barber seems to believe, the forces of McWorld will triumph. But this will only mean that the democratic nation-state will be subordinated to the forces of the international market, a development in postmodern politics that Barber sees as "bad. No, not bad, disastrous."

What can be done to strengthen the forces of democracy? Like many contemporary social critics, Barber calls for the strengthening of civil society, locally, nationally, and internationally. He sees the schools, churches, foundations, public-interest groups, and the media "when they subordinate their commercial needs to their civic obligations," as constituting a middle ground between government and the private sector. They provide the basis for alternative nonmarket institutions to regulate the market's anarchy or adverse consequences.



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However, the examples Barber gives of the results of the actions of such institutions all seem to require legislation—outlawing leaded gas, subsidizing public transportation, mandating hospital insurance for bus drivers, and limiting highway construction in scenic areas. But the extension of state regulation depends on and is legitimated by its democratic auspices, providing an alternative to the choice between radical collectivism and radical individualism.

Beyond the state, he sees an international "confederalism" as the next step in civic empowerment and cooperation. Presumably he means the extension of the activity of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but just how this is to be done is not explained. There are references to the Articles of Confederation as providing a model, but aside from stressing the noncompulsory nature of his proposed strong global democracy there are no details on how we build an alternative to Jihad and McWorld. Once again, enforcement seems to require some kind of international authority, but there is no discussion of relevant international cooperation that has been effective—the international human-rights movement, for example—or that which has failed—for example,various international codes of conduct for multinational corporations.

Barber's best-known book is *Strong Democracy* (1984), a critique of representative institutions and a call for more direct democracy, such as that he observed in the cantons of Switzerland. In its prescriptions for resolving problems *Jihad vs. McWorld* continues and extends Barber's concern with genuinely participatory democracy. Not everyone will be persuaded by his proposed solutions, but this vivid and well-written diagnosis of the conflicting tendencies in the contemporary world makes lively and persuasive reading. □

Paul E. Sigmund *is professor of politics at Princeton University. His most recent books are* The United States and Democracy in Chile *(Johns Hopkins) and an English translation of the fifteenth-century conciliar treatise,* The Catholic Concordance *by Nicholas of Cusa (Cambridge University Press).*

AMARINDIAN COSMOLOGIES

South and Meso-American Native Spirituality
From the Cult of the Feathered Serpent to the Theology of Liberation
Edited by Gary H. Gossen in collaboration with Miguel Leon-Portilla
Crossroad, $49.50, 550 pp.

Jacqueline Bell Mosio

From the Mayas pondering zero, to the Incas chasing evil out of their kingdom or the Aztecs listening to ancient words about proper behavior, to a contemporary Lacandon funeral rite in the Chiapas rain forest, to a two-day healing ritual by a Bribri shaman in Costa Rica, the native spiritual practices in Meso- and South America provoke wonder, awe, and perplexity.

Under the editorship of Gary Gossen, this collection of essays makes a substantial contribution to the Crossroad series, "World Spirituality." Gossen's aim is to make available "the inner states, worldview, and cosmology of practitioners and believers." His brief but effective introduction places religious development in a geographical, social, and historical setting from the Paleo-Indian period up to the present. Roots of Amerindian religions are as deep and complex as those of Old World religions, Gossen says, and the multiplicity of religious traditions in the region made it a crucible for the formation of fundamentally new religious expressions.

In the first of the volume's five sections, the beliefs of the great traditions at the time of the European conquest are sketched out: the Nahuatl-speaking Aztecs or Mexica, as they were called; the Maya in southeastern Mexico, Yucatan, and Guatemala; and the Quechua-speaking Incas of the Central Andes. These belief systems represented the official ideology of the ruling elites and priesthoods of empires that controlled millions of people at the time of the first contacts with Europeans, A.D. 1521–60.

In the first essay, Miguel Leon-Portilla takes us right into the heart of the impressive and complex Nahua/Aztec spirituality. While their practices provoked contradictory responses (even from the same individuals) ranging from horror to admiration, the beliefs as outlined by Leon-Portilla convey a sense of order and humble attentiveness to the universe. The basic concept of Nahua spirituality is to be deserving or worthy of life through offerings, sacrifice, and penance. In this the Nahuas were imitating the gods who had sacrificed themselves so that humans might be worthy of existence. Leon-Portilla portrays the Nahuas as concerned with appropriate moral behavior vis-à-vis their world and their gods. Their supreme god, Ometeotl, also addressed as "You Who Are Near and Close," was a male-female or dual god. Most gods appear either in pairs or have a dual nature.

If the Aztecs were concerned with appropriate behavior, the highest aspiration of the Maya was the conquest of time, and "to an astounding degree they succeeded," says Munro S. Edmonson. The presence of zero in Maya thought is related to the Mayan understanding of nothingness and of creation *ex nihilo*. The Maya pondered deeply the concept of zero, but were never satisfied about whether it was the beginning or the end. They thought that the mystery of the transition from 0 to 1 was the essence of god, and the mechanism of creation was the word. While the Mayan idea of god was unitary, Edmonson points out, the name (*hunab ku* or unified god) shows that god was plural as well as singular — and dual in that god was addressed as mother and father.

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Understanding the Andean religion from the point of view of its practitioners presents a difficulty because they had no writing system, notes Manuel M. Marzal, S.J., head of the anthropology department at the Catholic Pontifical University of Peru. Material about Incan beliefs comes primarily from Spanish chroniclers who often had other agendas and worked under various limitations. Marzal cites several of these chroniclers. Among the many details are descriptions of penitential rites and of the cloister or "house for chosen women" built next to temples dedicated to the Sun. Virgins (called "esteemed mothers") brought in from the provinces as young girls dedicated their virginity to the worship of the gods.

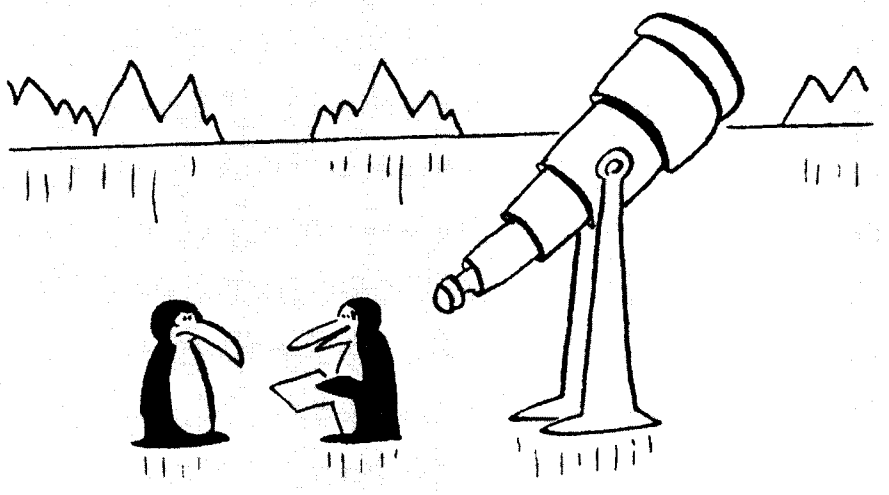
Elsa Cecilia Frost, of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, introduces the actors involved in the initial contacts between the European and native American cultures and lets them speak their own words as recorded in the abundant documentation. Spanish conquerors and their theologians called the Indians they taught and baptized "the wisest of human beings" and "natural serfs." Indians were regarded simultaneously as under the wholesale domination of the devil and as exceptional human beings who were beyond the common vices. Indians were always regarded, officially at least, as having souls; yet the question for the Spaniards was, how capable were they of reason?

J. Jorge Klor de Alva, professor of anthropology at UC Berkeley, outlines the process of what initially looked to the friars like conversion, but resulted in a version of Christianity that the Indians perceived as a continuation of their own beliefs. Indians who did not acculturate, and especially those who were pushed back into rural areas, developed a sort of "Christo-paganism." Klor de Alva holds that the missionaries' view of native religion as the devil's trickery gave the Nahua religion a negative validity—it was still within the system, albeit the devil's work—and allowed for bridges between the two belief systems. The Nahuas' flexible pantheon allowed them to adopt new gods and discard defeated ones. Their primary relationship was to local deities, and this encouraged adoption of the cult of the saints. Klor de Alva also points out that while church teachings on salvation had little meaning for the Nahuas, they did understand worship and ritual from their own religion—but as a means of averting evil and obtaining this-world objectives. Their prime moral imperative was keeping in balance all forces in the cosmos, the community, and in themselves.

Contributing to the collection's broad scope are several other essays, including one by Louise M. Burkhart tracing the development of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, two essays on the Maya-Christian synthesis among the Tzeltals and Yucatec Maya, and, especially interesting, "The Last Time the Inca Came Back: Messianism and Nationalism in the Great Rebellion of 1780–83" by Jan Szeminski. Szeminski examines the religious symbols in this Indian revivalist and separatist movement led by José Gabriel Thupa Amaro, a descendent of the last ruling Inca. The rebellion came to embody the spirit of Peru much as the veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe does in Mexico.

Szeminski, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, sketches the prevailing social structure of eighteenth-century Peru where Indians were governed by local rule in communes or settlement groups, and where the Inca aristocrats mediated the escalating economic demands of the growing European population. The Inca nobles, most trained in Jesuit schools, read works by sixteenth-century intellectuals of Indian descent, wore tunics with ancient symbols of power, and traveled to Spain to present their grievances to the king. Frustrated by the lack of response or redress, they conspired to rebel against the Crown. The movement, which Thupa Amaro took leadership of by proclaiming himself the Inca King of Peru, was based on ancient religious precepts, and had the restoration of moral well-being on earth as its objective. In its depth, passion, and complexity, the rebellion was an attempt, according to Szeminski, to alter an intolerable social order in ways that made sense to the Indians in terms of their own cosmology. Thupa Amaro was executed in 1781 and the rebellion officially defeated in 1783; yet, says Szeminski, Thupa Amaro was transformed into a founding hero of modern Andean social reform.

Also of note are four essays concerned with Indian spirituality in the Chiapas area where recent military action by indigenous groups has drawn international attention. □



"All the observations and calculations check out. We're upside down!"

Jacqueline Bell Mosio *is a translator and writer living in New York. She lived and worked in Mexico for many years.*

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(Continued from page 4)

among students but cooperation is; rioting over lost games against school rivals is not valued but good sportsmanship is; and murder is not valued by teachers and students threatened with guns but tolerance and respect are.

Mr. Carlin's premise appears to be that since we do not live in a morally homogeneous society—there are many competing and irreconcilable values out there—we should therefore abandon the notion of teaching values in our public schools. Thank you, Mr. Carlin, for that insight—but please reconsider.

Yes, we are a nonhomogeneous society but we as a people happen to agree on the moral value of dialogue in seeking the truth. The political system created by our Constitution clearly values open discussion. Carlin dismisses these as "noncontroversial" (and therefore, it seems, insignificant) values. In fact it is important that by and large we pluralistic Americans share these values, as Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and their followers did not.

It is true, as Carlin repetitively insists, that we are not able to agree about how society should handle abortions; but, as he fails to note, there are few if any among us who value abortions in and of themselves as healthy, happy events that we should encourage our daughters to experience. The freedom of discussion that we enjoy is not irrelevant to the future status of abortion in our society.

Carlin begins and ends with an assumption that we are not capable of discerning moral values as a society together—as if the difficulty of reaching moral consensus in society were unique to our era, and as if we today are uniquely incapable of doing so. Remember the days of Jim Crow? Remember the days before women's suffrage?

Tomorrow morning, real teachers and school administrators will set about the difficult task of teaching real values to real kids, every period of the school day, every day of the school week. Should we allow students to steal other kids' pencils, should we allow the use of gang signs and clothing to intimidate other students, should we allow one kid to be first in the lunch line every day, and should we allow teachers to seduce students or critically evaluate the essays of David R. Carlin in class? If you want to keep values out of the public schools, Mr. Carlin, you'll have to close them.

DANIEL J. MCGILL
Grand Junction, Colo.

Worth a subscription

Please renew my subscription. I thought the *New Ostrich Review* nonadvertisement [February 9] was hysterical.

PATRICIA PALAGI
Billings, Mont.

Women, priesthood, power

Michael Novak's comments on the necessity of a male priesthood [January 26] are worth considering, and answering. God is, indeed, the Father; the Second Person was incarnated as a man; and a gender-free concept of God does tend to become a God-free concept of God—Aristotle's First Cause or the primal energy some present-day dodgers of doctrine think themselves enamored of. But I question Novak's conclusion.

Women, after all, have been changed as much as men by living with the fact of Christ. If before the Incarnation priestesses worshiped a Gnostic, nongendered nonentity, and admittedly some still do, most who want to serve Christ as priests worship the God Christ reveals. I question as well the assumption that women err on the side of bloodless spirituality. Men were as likely as women to prefer Gnosticism or Arianism or Pelagianism to the knotty, difficult idea that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. Biology itself suggests, in fact, that if women err, it is in the opposite direction. Their very lives keep them close to the earth, to blood, sweat, tears.

As Novak wrote, we should most certainly accept Pope John Paul II's request that we make this "gender-alive dimension of our faith the object of renewed reflection, meditation, and inquiry." Such an exercise might lead us to note that women as well as men must recognize the necessary gentling of the warrior that belief in Christ imposes. True, it is the idea of empowerment that has informed and inspired

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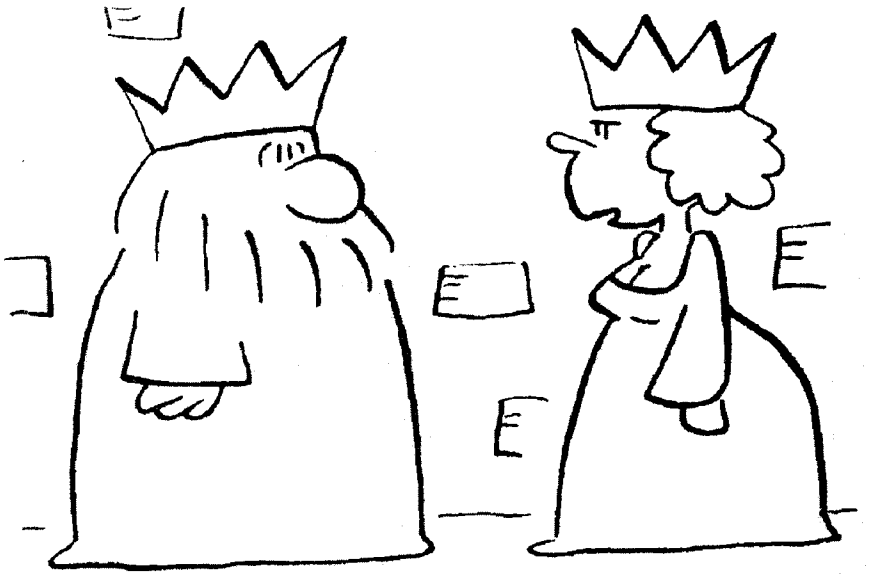

"It's all right with me, as long as I get **equal** *divine rights."*

much of the women's movement (and has led to achievements worth achieving). But a million-and-a-half abortions a year is only one of the symptoms that suggest the inadequacy of empowerment as a guiding moral principle. It would seem that women now need the priesthood as men have always needed it. They need the meditation upon the power of powerlessness that taking the central role in the reenactment of Christ's Passion, death, and Resurrection compels.

I served today as Eucharistic minister, offering my fellow parishioners the Blood of Christ. The experience, if it enriches, does so by humbling, by making actual both where ultimate power resides and what such power does.

MARIAN BURKHART
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Presenting the faith

As a public pastoral minister attempting to navigate the "minefields" of church teaching on homosexuality, I welcomed Richard Gaillardetz's articulation of practical criteria (for example, the hierarchy of truths, responsible dissent, theological notes, the role and sanctity of conscience) for responsible presentation of church teachings ["Proclaiming the Catholic Faith," February 9].

And yet, while I found all of Gaillardetz's criteria eminently reasonable and convincing, I still encounter difficulties when I have attempted to put them into practice. I wish he had elaborated on how to present church teaching "sympathetically." The young bishop of a small western diocese once told me of his concern that while I could present church teaching on homosexuality, I might also then "raise my eyebrows" and thereby dismiss what I had just said as of no importance!

I was also pleased to see Gaillardetz acknowledge the possibility of dissent by theologians and even "ordinary believers" as a manifestation of the Spirit bringing the whole church to truth. But how does one square this with Washington's Cardinal James Hickey's summary and unilateral dismissal of the official guidelines for dissent adopted and approved by all the United States bishops as "simply unworkable"?

Finally, I agree with your author that when presenting complex issues we must honestly acknowledge that there may be theological disagreement on some matters, and that a minister might even need to "acknowledge opposing arguments" to church teaching. In practice, though, even when one clearly distinguishes between authoritative magisterial teachings and theological opinions, one is still open to the charge of equating the two simply by presenting them. Believe me, I know: As one cardinal said to me, "You must tell the people that the theological opinions are poison and cannot be used."

The interplay between the theological and pastoral enterprises underlies some of these tensions, especially in the area of private conscience formation. But in the public arena of church life, and especially in serious disagreements and challenges over homosexuality, it seems somewhat unrealistic to think they can all be adequately addressed by "one-on-one pastoral counseling." I am really not convinced that "protracted debate"—even in a public setting—is all that harmful to church life or the pastoral minister, always provided it is informed and responsible. While "diversity in people's personal faith journeys, combined with often significant differences in theological background" might invite "misunderstanding," I think the risk is worth taking to ensure that many voices are heard as the whole community struggles to discern the truth.

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TIME STOPS

Ann O'Brien Treacy

But for a chance attendance at Mass on a first Saturday of the month, I might never have signed up for perpetual adoration. In small ways, it has changed my life.

I didn't attend that Mass to hear the priest from a neighboring parish speak about a chapel he hoped to open for eucharistic adoration. I went for breakfast. My good friend and Saturday breakfast companion told me she'd be available after Mass, so I decided to walk the mile to church and meet up with her there. But I got more than I bargained for.

Father Patrick McDowell described the "oasis of prayer" he was attempting to establish at the urging of several of his parishioners. He spoke of the benefits and of the needs—the needed prayers for world peace; prayers for the newly opened abortion clinic three blocks from his church, within his parish boundaries; and the need for additional people from other parishes to keep vigil round the clock. Of course, by the time he visited us only the least choice times were left. You know the hours, midnight to 6:00 A.M. I'm a mother, I've had newborns. No thanks, I thought. Been there, done that.

Good angel/bad angel battles are commonplace in my mind. My bad angel reminded me I live in Duluth, where it's cold in winter, all ten months of it, especially in the dark of night. The winds coming off Lake Superior are the same winds that sank the *Edmund Fitzgerald*. That morning my good angel, whispering very convincing thoughts of her own, had sway. After Mass, when the sign-up sheets were passed pew-to-pew, my friend and I decided to share an hour. Why not? We chose 5:00 to 6:00 A.M. We would be back home in plenty of time to make the children's lunches and get to work. As is so often the hallmark of our relationship—thinking the same thoughts, finishing each other's sentences—our first choice of days was also identical. We would each go every other week, she one Thursday morning, I the next, and so on.

My daughter and I attended the dedication Mass at which our bishop presided. Father Pat explained how the chapel just "came together." A former storage room of the old church was renovated. An interior designer donated her services, as did an architect. People and parishes donated things, services, and money. A small ornate altar found in the church's own basement fit perfectly into the tiny space. A new exterior entrance was created to lead directly into the chapel. It is unlocked twenty-four hours a day. Even a name for the chapel came easily. Inspired by its troubled surroundings, it's simply called Holy Innocents Chapel.

For those who don't know, perpetual adoration is the constant exposition of the Eucharist. A large, consecrated host is left visible on an altar, usually held by a monstrance (a footed cross with a glass window in its center). People are enlisted to keep company with Jesus 168 hours per week because, as the word "perpetual" implies, this is adoration that never ceases.

Whenever I'm asked about the hour vigil I keep, my answer is the same: It's worth it. I believe you are what you pay attention to. The traditional evening prayers of my youth had slowly been replaced by something else. Sleep. I was eager to put some prayer time back in my life. My silent hour in this chapel has an other-worldly feeling, retreat-like in its solitude. Time stops here. I find myself looking forward to going. There is nothing to pay attention to but God.

The benefits have spilled over into the other days of my week. I find myself praying more at home. The advantages of giving time to prayer are as tangible as making time to exercise. When I pray regularly I feel spiritually fit like the physical well-being I derive from routine walking or jogging. When I do neither habitually, I feel the same feelings—out of shape. Not guilty, exactly, just out of tune. I never find myself tired those days that I get up at 4:14 A.M., and I've been drawn to return many times in addition to "my" hour.

You don't need to be signed up in order to pray at a chapel of perpetual adoration. Just go. But if you find yourself returning regularly, you may want to contact the pastor and get your name on the coordinator's list.

I was wrong to suspect the initial interest would eventually wane. It's been over fifteen months now, and people seem attracted by the high degree of commitment involved. In our modest chapel that seats eight, at 5 A.M., I am rarely alone. □

Ann O'Brien Treacy, *a graduate of the College of Saint Catherine, is a clinical dietician.*

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